YOUNG HUNTERS IN PORTO RICO

THE YOUNG HUNTERS SERIES

By CAPTAIN RALPH BONEHILL

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~~Francis~~ and ~~Harry Douthitt~~

~~to~~

~~Arthur Longfellow.~~

To Robert Longfellow
from Dad

YOUNG HUNTERS IN PORTO RICO;

OR,

THE SEARCH FOR A LOST TREASURE.

BY

CAPTAIN RALPH BONEHILL,

Author of "Gun and Sled," "Young Oarsmen of Lakeview," "Rival Bicyclists," "Leo, the Circus Boy," "When Santiago Fell," A Sailor Boy with Dewey." "Off for Hawaii," etc.

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PREFACE.

"THE Young Hunters in Porto Rico" has been written at the earnest solicitation of a number of my young readers, who wished to follow the further adventures of the Gun and Sled Club.

In a former volume of this series, "Gun and Sled," I related how the club was formed and what a jolly time its members had during a winter outing on Snow-Top Island. In the present tale, one of the members becomes the proud owner of a yacht, and of course nothing will do but to take an ocean trip on the craft. During this trip the boys learn of a Spanish treasure said to be secreted in one of the great caves near Caguas, on the island of Porto Rico, and at once a hunt is instituted, and many stirring adventures follow.

The work was written primarily for the reader's amusement, yet I have endeavored within its pages to give a fair description of the Porto Rico of to-day, as it appears to a traveler from

our States. This new island domain of ours is but little known to the majority of us, but when its picturesqueness, and its mild climate, become a matter of publicity, Porto Rico is bound to become the Mecca for thousands of American tourists, in search of health and pleasure.

From the number of letters received, I am led to believe that "Gun and Sled" was well liked by my readers. If this is so, I sincerely trust that the present volume does not fall below the other in merit.

CAPTAIN RALPH BONEHILL.

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Young Hunters In Porto Rico.

CHAPTER I.

A STORM OFF SHORE.

"WHAT do you think of the weather, Bob?"

"It looks like a storm, Dick, and a heavy one, too."

"Exactly my idea. I wonder how far we are from the lighthouse?"

"I can't say. Jacob!"

"What is it, Master Robert?"

"How far is it to the lighthouse?"

The old Yankee sailor at the wheel of the Dashaway rubbed his grizzled chin and cast his eyes about before replying.

"I reckon as how it is about two miles or so," he said, with deliberation. "We have been running putty lively, you know."

"Do you imagine we can make it before that blow comes up?" asked Dick Wilbur, anxiously. "We don't want to lose a stick out here."

"We can do our best, sir. But we've got to work for it, for the wind is going down fast."

"I see that, Jacob. Hadn't you better throw her over a point or two?"

"I'll throw her over all she'll stand," answered Jacob Ropes, as he moved the handles of the brass-bound and highly polished steering wheel of the yacht. "Don't you think we had better lower the mainsail?"

"I think a couple of reefs will be enough—for the present," replied Dick Wilbur. "We can get the canvas in on the run when it freshens up."

At this old Jacob Ropes shook his head doubtfully, but as Dick Wilbur was commonly looked upon as the leader in the present outing, he said nothing in opposition. Both Dick Wilbur and Bob Hobart sprang to the halyards, and soon the mainsail was set to the former's satisfaction. The topsail had already been stowed away, and now the jib was likewise made safe.

The Dashaway had been cruising off the shore of the Carolinas for the best part of a week. She was as trim and substantial a yacht as one could meet anywhere, and had been built especially for Dick Wilbur's uncle by a firm of ship constructors who made a specialty of this class of work. She was long and narrow—yet not too narrow for safety—and while her mast was a towering one, the ballast of lead in her keel was sufficient to render her sailing qualities good even in a heavy blow.

In a former story, entitled "Gun and Sled," I told how four boys, Dick Wilbur, Bob Hobart, Don Harrison and Leander Carson organized the Gun and Sled Club, and went off on a long winter outing on Snow-Top Island. They were accompanied by Danny Guirk, a poor but merry-hearted Irish lad, who did all sorts of odds and ends of work for them, and amid snow and ice the club went gunning, fishing, ice-boat sailing and the like to their hearts' content.

When the lads returned to their homes in Waterford, it was decided by a unanimous vote to make the club a permanent one, and the snow still lay on the ground while they were planning for their outing during the coming summer.

At first it was decided to go up the lake upon which the village was situated, again, for another trip to the island where they had had so much sport; but the departure of Dick Wilbur's uncle for China caused a change in their plans. Dick was named after this relative, and before going away, Mr. Richard Wilbur gave to his namesake the Dashaway.

"I am sure you will appreciate the gift, my boy," had been his words. "Have the best of good times on the craft, but take care that you don't get drowned."

My young readers can well imagine how delighted Dick was over this gift. The youth

was now president of the club, and it instantly came into his head to invite the members to take the contemplated outing on board of the yacht. "And I'll take you anywhere that you want to go," had been Dick's concluding remark on making the offer.

The proposition was accepted as quickly as made, and then came the question of where they should go. Waterford lay a good many miles from the ocean, but an easy passage could be had by means of several lakes and a broad river, and it was finally decided that they should spread the Dashaway's white wings on the broad Atlantic, for a sail down the coast to Florida.

This was to be a long trip from home, and it was felt by the boys' parents that some older person should go with them. Squire Hobart, Bob's father, knew old Jacob Ropes well, and knew he was a first-class sailor, and it was this Yankee who was hired to do the main sailing of the yacht and keep a watchful eye over the lads. Old Jacob was as good-hearted a tar as could be found anywhere, and it did not take long for him and the members of the club to become warm friends.

"I don't think we are going to have any fishing to-day," remarked Leander Carson, as Dick came forward to where he and Don Harrison sat, near the companionway.

"I don't believe we're going to have any for several days, Leander," answered Dick, as he again surveyed the clouds.

"We're in for a big storm—I'm certain of it," came from Don. "If we—There goes Danny's gong!"

A loud beating of a wooden spoon on a tin platter had broken in on his speech. Now there appeared above the companionway steps the face of a chubby Irish lad wearing a big apron and a four-cornered cook's cap.

"All hands be afther comin' down fer dinner!" cried the young cook of the club. "An' don't waste no time or dem apple dumplin's will all be cold," she added.

"All right, Danny, we'll be down," answered Dick. "I can tell you what, boys, this sailing around gives a fellow a tremendous appetite."

"As if there was ever anything the matter with your eating apparatus," laughed Bob. "But say, Danny's bluefish does smell immense, doesn't it?" he went on, and was the first to slip down into the small but elegant cabin of which the Dashaway boasted. The others immediately followed, and soon all were feasting on the spread the Irish lad had prepared for them.

"Danny, I'll recommend you to the Waldorf-Astoria if ever I get to New York," observed Bob, as he paused, with a cob of green corn in

his hands. "As a cook you're getting to be A No. 1."

"I don't want no recommendation," returned the Irish lad, blushing. "It's good enough fun fer me to be waiting on dis crowd."

"And how do you like the ocean, Danny?" questioned Leander.

"De ocean is all right—if only it would stop rollin' once in awhile. Sometimes I'm afther t'inkin' I'm goin' ter turn inside out, dat's all," and Danny hurried off to the galley fire to bring on the dessert.

"I wonder if we'll have any such adventures on this trip as we had up to Hotchkiss and Snow-Top Islands," remarked Leander. "Don't you remember those bears, and how we got lost in the blizzard, and all that?"

"I don't believe we'll meet any bears out here," said Bob, solemnly, as he turned his gaze to the ceiling. He was bound to have his joke whenever he got the chance.

"Oh, stow it, Bob, you know what I mean. Of course we can't meet bears on the ocean, but we might meet a—a whale, or a waterspout, or something like that."

"And instead of a blizzard we might meet a gale that would send us to the bottom," put in Leander. "That would just suit you, wouldn't it?—just for the excitement."

"I sincerely hope we don't have any trouble," began Dick, seriously. "All I ask for is a pleasant trip, with good fishing and fine bathing, and maybe a little hunting, when we reach the Florida shore."

By this time the apple dumplings had been brought on, and for several minutes the conversation lagged, as the boys paid strict attention to the dainties with their appetizing sauce of butter and sugar. The dumplings were scarcely finished when there came a shrill whistle from the deck.

The sound proceeded from a whistle which old Jacob was in the habit of using when he wanted to call one and another, and they happened to be out of calling distance. Rushing up the companionway, Dick gave one glance at the heavens and saw the reason for the summons. Half of the sky was literally black with clouds of wind and rain, and already behind the Dashaway could be seen the angry white-caps, growing larger and coming closer each instant.

"All hands on deck, and be quick about it!" he yelled. "Jacob, hadn't Leander better take the wheel?"

"Yes, and lose no time," answered the Yankee sailor, and as Leander relieved him, he ran forward with the other boys and began to stow away the mainsail. In the meantime Danny

received orders to fasten down the hatch and close up all of the portholes.

"We're in for it, beyond a doubt," said Dick, as the breeze struck the yacht with increasing force, tearing savagely through the riggings and causing Don to shudder. The rain now began to fall, and all of the club members, and old Jacob donned their oilskins.

"We can't make the harbor now," announced the old Yankee. "If we tried it, we may run on the rocks and be smashed to pieces. We'll have to run out." And he threw the yacht over, something that made her dip considerably, and which sent more than one wave rushing over her bow.

The wind now commenced to shriek dismally, and the darkened sky was lit up with distant flashes of lightning, invariably followed by long, low rumbles of thunder.

"I can't see de use uf runnin' into dat storm," piped up Danny Guirk. "If I was runnin' t'ings I'd steer fer de land, dat's wot I would do."

"You be careful, or you'll go overboard—" began Bob, when a yell from Dick interrupted him.

"Here it comes, boys! Hold hard, all of you! My, but isn't it a corker!"

A ripping crack of thunder and a blinding

flash of lightning drowned out the last of his words, and then the very heavens appeared to open, to let down a deluge of water that threatened to swamp the gallant yacht. A hurricane of wind followed, and the waves lashed and pounded the craft upon every side.

"By gum!" came suddenly from old Jacob. "Did any of ye see thet, boys?"

"See what?" demanded Don and Dick in a breath.

"The small boat over to starboard. She was bottom side up and somebody was a-clingin' to her!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN FROM THE WRECK.

ALL on board the Dashaway were intensely interested in the discovery old Jacob had made.

"You are sure you saw the small boat?" questioned Dick.

"I didn't see a thing," declared Don.

"Nor did I," added Leander.

"I saw the boat right enough, lads," returned the old Yankee tar. "It was out there," he pointed with his long forefinger. "Look! look!"

Another flash of lightning had lit up the firmament, making all as bright as day. Not fifty yards from the Dashaway all beheld an upturned rowboat, just rising to the top of one of the long ocean swells. To one end of the tiny craft a man was clinging desperately. It was possible that he was crying for help, but if so, the uproar of the storm drowned out his voice completely.

"Dat fellow will be lost sure!" burst out Danny Guirk. "Poor man, he must feel awful!"

"We must try to save him," came from Dick.

"That's true," said Don. "But how?"

"I don't see what we can do, with such a sea running," added Leander. "If we get much closer we'll run him down."

"We can go a little nearer, and then we can try to throw him a rope with a life preserver attached," concluded Dick.

To attempt to do more than keep the yacht headed in the teeth of the gale was a hazardous undertaking. Yet all on board the Dashaway realized that a human life was in peril, and that some risk must be run in order to effect a rescue, were such a thing possible.

"I can't see him now," said old Jacob, as the lightning seemed to subside for the time being. "It's as black as night."

"Let us fire up with a Bengal light," suggested Leander, and ran off for the article. Soon it was spluttering in the rain, but brightening up the scene about them for several hundred feet.

"Help! help!" came faintly to their ears, as the Dashaway drew closer to the upturned rowboat. "Don't leave me to perish! Help!"

"Catch the life line!" roared Dick, and whirling the article over his head, he let fly with all the strength and skill at his command.

It was a clever throw, the line shooting over the middle of the small boat and the life preserver hitting the water just beyond. The cast-

away caught hold of both, but hesitated about letting go of the rowboat that had so far saved him from a watery grave.

"Haul in, all of you!" cried Dick. "I'll stand at the rail with this boathook and try to keep him from being pounded on the yacht's side."

The young leader's instructions were obeyed, and slowly but surely the upturned boat and its occupant came closer. But then came a huge wave, and man and boat parted company and disappeared from view.

"Hold tight!" screamed Dick, as the man reappeared, and then he reached down with the boathook, and in a twinkle the rescued one came sprawling on the deck, while Dick slipped flat on his back.

The rescue had taken place none too soon, for now the storm increased in fury, and old Jacob lashed himself to the wheel, while ordering all of the others below.

"He has fainted;" said Leander, as he knelt over the man who had been saved. "Let us carry him below;" and this was done. In the cabin the stranger was made as comfortable as possible and stimulants were administered; but it was a long time before he either spoke or moved.

The storm lasted all of the afternoon and the greater part of the night, and nobody thought of going to sleep.

"If you wanted an adventure, Leander, I guess you are getting it," remarked Don, grimly. "This is worse than that blizzard. I'll be thankful if we get out of this with whole skins."

"Dis is de greatest storm I ever seed," put in Danny. "If de boat shakes much more, every-t'ing in de crockery line will be gone to smash, dat's a fact," and he rolled off to secure his dishes and pans from such a catastrophe. Several dishes and glasses were wrecked, but not as many as Danny imagined.

The man who had been rescued was a heavy-set individual of twenty-five or thirty years of age, and Dick rightfully guessed that he was an Englishman. He had been struck on the head, and it was found that a nasty cut must be plastered up and then bound with a cloth.

"Poor fellow, he has certainly had a hard time of it," observed Don. "I'm glad we managed to save him."

"And so am I glad," returned Dick. "I'll wager he'll have a story worth telling when he gets around to it."

"Yes, I have a tale worth telling," came with a gasp from the sufferer; but having opened his eyes for a moment, he closed them again, and said nothing more for fully half an hour.

The fury of the storm had caused the Dash-away to move far out to sea, and when, at eleven

in the morning, old Jacob announced that all danger was over, they calculated that it would take them twenty-four hours and more to reach Savannah, whither they had been bound for some extra ship's supplies.

"I don't care—so long as we have enough eating to last us," was Dick's comment. "I'm happy to escape with my life."

"And I am happy to think that we have been the means of saving somebody else," put in Don.

Both had gone on deck to see what old Jacob had to say about their next movement. They returned to the cabin to find the rescued man stirring again.

"You have saved my life, lads," were his first words. "I shall never forget you for that, never!" and he put out his hand feebly, for one and another to press.

"Did you fall overboard from some boat?" questioned Dick, kindly.

"I did—that is, I am not quite sure," was the measured answer.

"You are not sure?" repeated Don, with a puzzled look.

"No, I am not quite sure. I was standing by the steamer's rail and the ship was pitching terribly. Suddenly I was lifted off my feet—how I cannot tell—and then I found myself pitching headlong into the water. It is strange! strange!—" And the man drew a long breath.

"Do you mean to say that you think somebody might have pitched you into the ocean?" cried Dick.

"I am sure of nothing, my lads. But—but—there was one man on board the Advance who would not have been above heaving me overboard, were the chance given to him." The sufferer looked around curiously. "You have saved my life; I don't know but that I may as well tell you my secret."

"We would certainly like to hear your story," returned Leander, bluntly.

"Then I will tell it as well as I am able. In the first place, I am an Englishman, and my name is Robert Menden. Less than two weeks ago I took passage on the steamship Advance, bound from Liverpool to Havana, Cuba. I wished to sail direct for Porto Rico, but could not obtain the passage, so took what I considered the next best thing. You know it is easy to get passage to any of the West Indies from Havana."

"Yes, I know that," returned Dick. "Havana is quite a center of trade."

"I was bound to Porto Rico in search of a fortune, which I heard of quite by accident while I was travelling in Spain nearly a year ago. On board the Advance was a man who knew my secret. He was an old enemy of mine, and I

cannot get it out of my head but that he helped me overboard, not only to get rid of me, but also that he might secure the treasure for himself."

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING ABOUT A GREAT TREASURE.

"A TREASURE!" cried Don, as Robert Menden paused, to partake of some soup which Danny had brought to him.

"Yes, a treasure, lads—a treasure said to be worth twenty or thirty thousand dollars. Of course, that is not a fabulous sum, but it is pretty large for a poor Englishman like me, who has never had over two hundred pounds in his life."

"It's enough!" cried Dick. "I'd like to pick it up myself."

"But what kind of a treasure is it?" questioned Leander. "Won't you tell us more about it?"

"And about your enemy?" added Bob.

"I will tell you everything, lads—for I have nothing to conceal, and you have been very kind to me. But first let me say, that I am at present totally unable to pay you for what you are doing for me now."

"We don't want any pay," came from Dick promptly, and the others nodded.

"As far as I know, I am not worth a dollar in the world, as you Americans would put it. I had something like eighty pounds in my pocket when I fell overboard, but my wallet is gone, and here is all I now possess." And Robert Menden held out a shining shilling and several English pennies.

"We'll try to set you on your feet again," came from Bob, who was always generous to the core. "We are not rich, but we can do something; can't we, fellows?"

"To be sure," answered Don. "But won't you tell your story, about your enemy and that treasure? I declare, it sounds like a book!" and he smiled broadly. Don had always been a great boy to read stories of pirates, treasures, Indians, and marvellous boy hunters and trappers. Yet he had never had his head turned by these bits of thrilling fiction.

"Well, to begin with, as I said before, I am an Englishman, and was born and brought up in a village not far from the city of London. Our family was fairly well-to-do, and for twenty years of my life matters ran smoothly enough. But then my parents died, and I being alone, moved into London, and became a clerk in a firearms store.

"In this store there was another clerk named Joseph Farvel. Joseph was not of the friendly

sort, and he hated me from the start, because he had expected to get the place I was filling, for a friend of his, who was to pay him five pounds for obtaining the situation for him. He tried to get me into trouble, so that I would be discharged and he would have another chance for his friend, but his little plot against me was discovered. and he was thrown out in consequence.

"From that moment on Joseph Farvel was my bitter enemy, and he tried in several ways to injure me. Finally, I caught him one day in the park and gave him a sound thrashing, and told him if he ever interfered with me again I would have him arrested. As long as I remained in London I never saw him again."

"And I shouldn't think you would want to see him," put in Dick, as Robert Menden paused, to partake of the warm soup once again.

"When I became head clerk for the firearms firm, I was sent to Madrid, Spain, to look up a certain contract with the Spanish Government for small arms. In the meantime, Joseph Farvel had secured a position with another firearms company, and they were also after this contract. We met in Madrid and another quarrel ensued, but nothing came of it.

"I secured the contract, and was on the point of returning to England, when I fell in with an

old Spanish sailor who had spent much of his time in Cuban and Porto Rican waters. I did this fellow several favors, and in return for this he told me of a treasure said to be hidden away in one of the great caves of Porto Rico, which are located to the southwest of Caguas, and five miles west of the village of Aguas Buenas."

"And what was the treasure?" cried Leander, who sat by, his mouth half open in wonder.

"It was a treasure in Spanish gold, said to have been placed in the cavern by a smuggler, who had journeyed inland after he had found the coast of Porto Rico too hot to hold him. It was said to be locked up in a strong cedar chest, and buried under a long, flat stone upon which was cut a cross and the initials M. M. M."

"That ought to be easy to find—if you can locate the cave," said Bob.

"Exactly—if I can locate the cave. But you must remember that, although the caves of Porto Rico are but little known, the largest of them, called the Dark Cave, is said to rival your own Mammoth Cave of Kentucky."

"Gracious! If it's as big as that, then that's another question," returned Bob, and his face fell, for he was already thinking of taking a hand at treasure-hunting himself.

"I have some fairly good directions as to how to reach the cave," went on Robert Menden.

He cleared his throat. "But I am getting ahead of my tale. I heard of this treasure in Madrid, and strange as it may seem, Joseph Farvel heard of it, too.

"When I returned to London, bad news awaited me. The firm I had represented had failed, and instead of getting a large sum of money for my success in Madrid, I was thrown out of employment. Times were hard and I could not secure another situation, and at last I sailed for Havana, intending to go from there to Ponce, Porto Rico, and then strike out into the interior of the island in search of the hidden chest of gold.

"You can well imagine my surprise when on the second day out I ran across Joseph Farvel, who had also taken passage for Cuba. We quarrelled once more, and he accused me of dogging his footsteps, and of wanting to get *his* treasure away from him. I told him I wanted nothing to do with him and that I reckoned the treasure would belong to the first man who found it."

"And so he threw you overboard later on!" exclaimed Leander. "What a rascal!"

"I am not certain that he did. I was not feeling well and I was also very sleepy, and it may be that I fell overboard by pure accident. And yet I cannot get it out of my mind but that he

sneaked up behind me and gave me a gentle lift and a shove, just as the steamship was swinging to aid him." Robert Menden paused. "That is my story, and now let me know what you think of it, and where you are bound, and what you intend to do with me."

CHAPTER IV.

A COMPACT OF IMPORTANCE.

"It's certainly a strange story," mused Dick, and looked questioningly at the other club members, and at Danny, who stood at the doorway, taking in with wide open eyes all that was being said.

"Sure, an' if I was youse fellers I'd hunt up dat gold!" remarked the Irish lad. "Twenty t'ousand dollars! Dat's a regular—er—mint, dat is!"

"It's not ours to hunt up," answered Bob; but he looked at Dick questioningly, nevertheless.

"You want to know what I think of your story," said the leader of the club, addressing the man they had saved. "I think it's a mighty interesting yarn."

"And where are you bound?"

"We were bound for Savannah, to take on some extra ship's stores. But the storm made us turn out to sea again, and the wind has carried us a good bit out of our course."

"It looks to me as if you lads were out for pleasure."

"You are right. We form an organization known as the Gun and Sled Club. Last winter we spent a large part of our time in the woods and had immense fun. This spring my uncle left me this yacht, and we decided to sail down the Atlantic coast as far as Florida, and then go hunting and fishing and sporting generally. But I guess it's time we introduced ourselves;" and Dick proceeded to go through the usual form for all hands but old Jacob, who was still on deck, in sole charge, now that the storm was over.

The introduction and hand-shaking made everybody feel more at home, and Robert Menden questioned several of them concerning the contemplated outing. "I presume you will land me at either Savannah or in Florida," he concluded.

"Supposing we land you in Porto Rico?" said Bob, with a sudden twinkle in his eye.

"Will you do that?" asked Robert Menden, quickly.

"It's a pretty good sail for the Dashaway," said Bob, thoughtfully. "But I think it would be all right—if we could make the stores hold out."

"Hurrah! let us go to Porto Rico!" shouted

Leander, who stood by. "I wanted to say go before, but I hardly dared."

"Can you go if you want to?" questioned the Englishman, as he gazed from one to another of the boys.

"Certainly," said Dick. "We can go where we please, for our time is our own, and so is our money—what little there is of it. We are not millionaires' sons, you know," he added, with a smile. "We are working this outing on as cheap a scale as possible."

"You are better off than I, who haven't a pound——"

"But you'll get that treasure—" broke in Don.

"Perhaps." Robert Menden looked very thoughtful. "Boys, I have a proposal to make to you."

"I'm ready for it, and I'll say 'yes' in advance," cried Leander.

"Then you know what is in my mind," laughed the Englishma

"You want us to take you to Porto Rico?"

"Yes."

"And want us to help you hunt for that treasure?"

"If you care to do so. And I will give you a share of what is found."

"How much?" asked Don, who was breathing

hard, and fancied he had the treasure already in his possession.

"That is a matter to be talked over. You see, I have lost my money, so if we all go together, you will have to bear the expenses of the trip."

"We'll keep the expenses down—we'll have to do it," put in Dick. "What kind of a bargain are you willing to make?"

Robert Menden thought for a moment. "I want to go to Porto Rico immediately, so that I can reach that cave before Joseph Farvel. If you set sail in that direction without delay, I think we can beat him, even if he takes a steamer from Havana to Ponce."

"I guess you are right there," answered Leander. He got out a chart and studied it for a moment. "At a rough estimate we are now about a thousand miles from the coast of Porto Rico, while the distance to that point from Havana, Cuba, is several hundred miles longer."

"And your enemy may have to lay over several days for a steamer," put in Bob.

"If he thinks you are dead he won't hurry," added Dick. "Perhaps he will stay in Havana for a week or two."

"That is what I was thinking," resumed Robert Menden. "Yet he is a very greedy fellow, and he will want to lay hands on that gold just as quickly as he can."

"Well, I guess anybody would want to do that," laughed Leander. "Such a sum of money is not to be sneezed at."

"I am willing to sail for Porto Rico as soon as we can, but we ought to have some ship's stores for such a long trip," said Dick. "We have no fresh vegetables left, so Danny tells me."

"Well, you must do as you think best about that," answered the Englishman. "But to get to business, as you Americans would say. If you will take me to Porto Rico as speedily as you can, and accompany me on a trip inland to where this cave is said to be located, and will bear all expenses—making them as little as possible—I will agree to give you one-quarter of all that is found."

"A quarter of twenty thousand dollars would be five thousand," said Bob. "That's not bad."

"And, remember, the treasure may be worth thirty thousand—or more," put in Leander. "I move this club take up with Mr. Menden's offer."

"I second the motion," cried Don, promptly.

"Ditto!" came from Bob.

"The motion is put—and carried unanimously," said Dick, almost as quickly. "Mr. Menden, from henceforth we are at your service, so far as our means afford and as long as we can keep out of positive danger."

"Let us put our agreement in writing," suggested Leander, who was going to have no trip-up in the matter. This was also agreed to, and the tall youth was set to work on the important document. When it was finished, both Robert Menden and Dick signed it, and Danny Guirk and old Jacob added their names as witnesses.

A long consultation was had, and it was resolved to run for St. Augustine, on the Florida coast, and there procure such supplies as were necessary.

The course of the Dashaway was changed, and the wind being still fresh, they made good progress.

"Get your list ready," said Bob, "so we won't have to stay ashore any longer than is necessary."

"I'm preparing the list now," answered Dick, who was consulting with Danny. The Irish boy was in high delight, having been promised a round hundred dollars extra, should the proposed hunt for the treasure prove successful. Old Jacob had been put down for a like sum, also to the old tar's satisfaction.

The run to St. Augustine proved without special interest. The boys found Robert Menden a nice companion. The Englishman had not only travelled a good bit, but had also been a great reader, and he was not above telling a good story whenever called upon to do so.

"I had a pretty fair wardrobe," he said, on the morning following the conversation just mentioned. "But now I haven't anything but what is on my back."

"You can look over the things on the yacht," replied Dick. "Some of them, I think, will fit you—and what else must be had can be purchased in St. Augustine."

Since the start from home all of the boys had taken a deep interest in the yacht, and old Jacob had succeeded in making a fairly good sailor of each of them. But there were still many things to learn, and now Robert Menden announced that he would take lessons in seamanship, too.

"I don't want you to think I am lazy," he said. "I am just as willing to work as anybody. I expect by the time Porto Rico is reached I'll be a regular old salt."

"We can't get to that island fast enough for me," cried Bob. "I'm crazy to get at that treasure." And he felt like dancing a jig for joy, little dreaming of all the thrilling adventures and grave perils in store for the party.

CHAPTER V.

AN ADVENTURE IN ST. AUGUSTINE.

"HURRAH! we are in sight of the coast!"

It was Dick who uttered the cry, late in the afternoon of the second day after the conversation recorded above.

The Dashaway had made a clean run of over a hundred and thirty miles, and had come in sight of the coast but a few miles above the little river upon which St. Augustine is situated, about two miles from the rolling Atlantic.

Fortunately, old Jacob knew these waters thoroughly, so the run to the river and up to the ancient Spanish city was not a hazardous one. As soon as they dropped anchor, all of the boys went ashore and Robert Menden went with them.

It was no easy matter to rush through Dick's long orders for stores, but they did their best, and by two o'clock of the afternoon following, the yacht was ready for a journey of a thousand miles or more.

"We won't live on the fat of the land,"

grinned Dick. "But we won't have to live on salt meat, either."

"I don't mind some salt meat," smiled Robert Menden, "but I don't like too much of it."

While Dick was superintending the loading of the stores, Don and Bob strolled off to take a look at the ancient town, which possesses several points of interest.

"It's a good deal different from things North," observed Don. "Even the trees are different. How beautiful the palms are!"

"I guess we'll see as much of tropical life as we care for when we reach Porto Rico," replied Bob. "Gracious, but it's warm!" he added, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"And we'll find it hot enough, too," laughed his chum. "That trip to the interior won't be exactly a picnic, Bob."

"That's true. But then a fellow can stand something for the sake of making a lot of money. I wish we had time to stay here a few days. I would like to go out into the wood with a gun, and see what I could knock over."

"Yes, it's a pity we can't have at least one day's fishing and hunting. But then we must get to Porto Rico before that Joseph Farvel. What a scamp he must be!"

"The world is full of such chaps. But if only we can outwit him I shall be satisfied."

The walk of the two boys took them to one of the broad highways leading to the residential portion of the city.

The highway was lined with carriages coming and going, and bicycles were likewise numerous.

"I wouldn't mind a ride on a wheel myself," observed Don. "Those fellows seem to enjoy it thoroughly," and he pointed to four boys, all in uniform, who were riding wheels which were peculiarly striped in red, white and blue.

"They carry the flag colors," smiled his chum. "They must be patriotic."

"And what real, live American lad isn't patriotic, Bob?"

"True for you. If we—Hullo, what does that mean?"

Bob broke off short and pointed up the broad highway.

Around a bend a fine carriage had appeared, drawn by a team of coal black steeds.

For some reason not now apparent, the team had taken their bits in their teeth and were running away at topmost speed.

The turnout had two seats, but its sole occupant was a little girl not over six or seven years of age—a pale, blue-eyed creature, with yellow curls streaming down her back.

"Help! stop the bad, bad horses!" sobbed the little girl, as the tears of terror ran down her cheeks.

"By ginger! this is awful!" gasped Don. "That little girl will be thrown out and killed."

"Can't we stop the horses?" questioned Bob. "We must do it somehow!" he added, with sudden determination.

The chums had been walking along the side of the highway, but now Bob ran out directly in the path of the oncoming team.

"Be careful, Bob!" yelled Don, but, nevertheless, he followed his chum, at the same time pulling off the light jacket he wore over his outing shirt.

Bob set his teeth hard. Half a dozen people were yelling at him, but it is doubtful if he heard a word of the advice. His one thought was centered on the little girl and what he might do to save the creature. "I must do it," he muttered. "I *must!*"

On and on came the team, carriage drivers and bicyclists losing no time in getting out of the way, so that they themselves might escape injury. In such a moment, "self-preservation is the first law of nature," to nine out of every ten human beings.

Whizz! It was Don's coat that flew forth, just as the team ranged up almost in front of him. The youth's aim was good, for the garment shot past the nose of the nearest steed, to land on the head of the second, thus momentarily checking the mad dash of the pair.

As the coat came from one side, Bob leaped from the other, clasping the steed nearest to him around the neck. Then Don's garment slipped to the highway, and away went the horses again, the reins dangling at their heels and the carriage swaying violently from side to side, as the wheels found stone, hollow or rut along the way.

Fortunately for Bob, his hold was a good one, and pulling up his legs, the youth was enabled to keep clear of the horse's hoofs, which came up rather high as he kept to his mad chase.

"Bob, look out!" came from Don, and then turnout and boy passed out of hearing of the chum left standing in a cloud of dust, coatless and hatless, and without knowing what to do next.

But a short distance away was a side road, much rougher than the main highway. As the team went on, the horse carrying Bob's weight lagged slightly behind, and when the side road was reached, both steeds turned and darted in the new direction.

By this time poor Bob realized that he had cut out a large piece of work for himself. He wanted to swing himself up on the animal's back, but for several minutes was unable to do so. In the meantime the carriage swayed more violently than ever.

"Stop the bad horses!" shrieked the little girl, and then arose to her feet, as if to jump from the carriage.

"Sit down!" cried Bob, as he caught a brief glance of the little maiden. "Sit down, or you'll get hurt worse!"

The girl heard his words, but hesitated about accepting his suggestion. Bob had now one foot across the horse's back, and with one mighty pull he hauled himself up on the steed's neck. The animal tried to throw him, but the youth was game, and a second later had jumped to the rear and was leaning down, gathering up the reins.

"Oh, dear me!" gasped the little girl, as she saw him pick up the leathers. Then came a leap, and Bob landed on the front seat of the carriage.

The boy now had the reins, and each was twisted tightly about his wrist. But could he haul in such a fiery team? It looked doubtful.

He braced his feet as well as he was able, and hauled back. One horse had lost the bit, but the other had not, and away went the latter with renewed energy, which it seemed that nothing could overcome.

Crack! It was the frail dashboard of the carriage that had given way, and in an instant Bob's foot went through a hole, which held his leg as if in a vise.

"More trouble," was his thought, and he sought to extricate himself from this new difficulty, but still keeping tight hold of the lines, knowing only too well that if they slipped down again, the attempted rescue would be a failure.

"Please, please stop the bad, bad horses!" pleaded the girl, who occupied the seat behind him.

"I will—if I can," panted Bob. "But sit down, or you may be thrown out. There's a bend ahead."

The bend was not far off, and Bob still trying to free his leg from the wreck of the dashboard when the team made the turn so closely that the carriage went up high on the wheels of one side. For a few seconds it looked as if the turnout would be thrown over, but it gradually righted itself, and on they went again, more madly than ever.

Around the bend, the trees and bushes were thick, and but little could be seen. Yet presently a sight caught Bob's eyes which fairly made his heart stop beating.

They were approaching the river bank fairly and squarely, and in less than half a minute more the end of the road would be gained.

"The river!" wailed the little girl. "We will drown!"

"Not if I can help it!" answered Bob, and pulled on the reins harder than ever.

Then came a snap, as one of the reins parted close to the boy's hand, and over he tumbled to the side of the seat, leaving the team, uncontrolled, to dash on to their fate, carrying himself and the little girl with them.

CHAPTER VI.

INTO THE RIVER AND OUT.

"My gracious! what had I best do now?"

Bob uttered the words mechanically, as with staring eyes he gazed at the stretch of water which the carriage was approaching so rapidly. He felt that it would be impossible to stop the team before the river bank was gained.

With might and main he sought to loosen his foot. But that member had caught between a bit of the dashboard and a brace, and was as fast as if in a bear trap.

The little girl began to scream, but Bob hardly heard her. Along jounced the turnout, then came a slight pause, and over the bank went the team, landing in the river with a loud splash. The carriage followed, and on the instant the youth found himself under the water.

It was truly a situation of extreme peril, and it is a wonder that poor Bob did not lose utter control of himself. But even in that dire hour he felt that if he would save himself he must have his wits about him.

As he went under, the horses were forgotten, and bending forward, he caught the shattered dashboard in both hands and endeavored to wrench it asunder.

It was hard work, and as he applied himself to it he felt the carriage turning, until it was bottom side up.

"That poor girl!" he thought, and tugged away harder than ever.

At last came a pull that loosened his foot. It was high time, for his breath was almost gone and a strange light seemed to flicker before his brain. Clearing himself of the wreck, he darted upward to the surface.

"She's gone!" was his thought, as he filled his lungs with the fresh air which they so much needed. He had saved himself, but his heart was heavy to think that most likely the little girl had been drowned.

Suddenly his eyes caught sight of a white object floating some twenty feet away. He gave a second look and recognized the little girl's dress.

Fortunately, as my old readers know, Bob was a good swimmer, and without hesitation he struck out for the floating object. As he came closer he saw that the little maiden was still conscious.

"Help me!" she wailed, when she saw him.

"Don't let me go down in the cold water, please!"

"I will save you," said Bob, firmly. "Here, put your arms around my neck," and he caught hold of her, for he saw that she was more than ready to sink to rise no more.

It was wonderful what trust the little girl imposed upon this youth whom she had never before met. Bob's face was a thoroughly honest and reliable one, and youth sometimes reads character better than old age, doing so by instinct rather than reason.

The boy had just struck out for shore when there came a shout, and two bicycle riders appeared, followed by an elderly man on horseback.

The elderly man was very much excited and waved one hand wildly over his head.

"Save Bessie!" he yelled. "Save my daughter!"

And then dismounting, he attempted to leap into the stream, but one of the bicyclists held him back.

"I'll bring her in," called out Bob.

"Papa! papa!" cried the little girl. "I want my papa!"

Slowly but surely Bob neared the bank of the river. The elderly man was close at hand, and the instant he was able to do so he caught his

child by the arm and raised her up. "Thank God!" he murmured hoarsely, and strained the little one to his breast, while the tears started to his eyes.

One of the bicycle riders gave Bob a hand, and almost exhausted, the lad was drawn up to a place of safety. He tried to stand up, but could not, and sank down on the sward.

In the meantime the horses had come up and were plunging wildly, close to the wreck of the carriage. Both were on their sides, but presently one raised himself to a swimming position and struck out for the shore, dragging his mate and the wreck after him.

The bicyclist, who up to this point had done nothing, now ran forward, and as the horse came closer he caught the animal by the curb, and soon both steeds were safe, although each was bruised by hoof strokes received from the other.

"Your horses are all right now," said the wheelman, as he cut the team loose from the carriage, and tied them fast to a nearby palm tree. The carriage was fastened to the river bank.

"Never mind the horses—it is my child I was thinking of," responded the elderly man. He turned to Bob. "Young man, you have done me a great service—a very great service, indeed."

"Bessie is all wet," put in the little girl. "And so is that boy, papa. We want dry clothing."

"Yes, yes, child, you shall go back to the hotel directly. But first I must reward this brave young man for what he has done."

"Thank you, but I am not looking for a reward, sir," answered Bob, frankly. "I am glad that I was able to be of assistance."

"You are as generous as you are brave; I can see that. May I ask your name?"

"Robert Hobart; although all my friends call me Bob."

"My name is Garrison Grey, and this is my only child, Bessie. I am glad to know you, Robert, and I'll not forget you; rest assured of that. Do you live here?"

"Oh, no; I'm from a place away up North, and just came in on a yacht with some of my friends. We are off on a summer cruise to Porto Rico."

"Porto Rico! Why, I am in business in that island," cried Garrison Grey.

"Then perhaps we'll meet in Porto Rico," returned Bob.

"That is true; and if we do, rest assured that I will do what I can to entertain you. I live and do business in Ponce, and here is my card," and Mr. Grey handed over the pasteboard, which showed that he was in the wholesale coffee business.

By this time Don came up on a run, anxious to know the result of the runaway.

"It was an adventure and no mistake," he observed, after he had been introduced and Bob had told his tale. "As soon as I caught sight of the river I was afraid you had all been drowned."

Mr. Grey was stopping at the Grand Hotel, and he insisted that the two boys accompany him to the place, and be introduced to his wife. Then he followed Bob and Don down to where the Dashaway was taking on the last of her stores, and was invited on board.

"Certainly a fine craft," he observed, as he was taken around. "She ought to stand the trip to Porto Rico very well. What place do you expect to stop at first?"

"We haven't decided that point yet," answered Dick.

"Well, don't forget to come to Ponce sooner or later. I will be at home very shortly—as soon as my business in St. Augustine is finished. I am going to take several friends with me."

In less than an hour the anchor of the yacht was pulled up and the sails set, and off they glided down the smooth river, Garrison Grey waving them an adieu from the dock.

"A fine man," mused Bob. "I hope we do meet again."

"We'll have to stop at Ponce before we leave the island," answered Leander.

And so they parted with the coffee merchant, little dreaming of the curious future meeting in store for the merchant and themselves.

CHAPTER VII.

SAVING THE TRAIN.

For several days the weather proved delightful, and as the wind was strong and steady the Dashaway made rapid progress.

All felt in the best of spirits, and with fishing and telling stories the time passed as quickly as could reasonably be expected.

The boys soon learned that Robert Menden was a great story-teller, and never tired of sitting around him when he was spinning one of his yarns.

One day they were talking of bicycle riding, when the young Englishman shook his head slowly. "No more riding for me," he said. "I have had enough and to spare of it. I once came close to losing my life in England through it—when I was out with a friend named Rexwell. I'll never forget that adventure."

"Tell us of it!" shouted several of the boys at once; and sitting in a cozy corner of the deck, Robert Menden told his story as follows:

"Rexwell and I were two days out from Orelle in the heart of England. We were fol-

lowing the smooth, winding road which leads from Paxton to Riley's, and which crosses the K. T. & B. railway at half a dozen or more points.

"Rexwell had proposed the bicycle tour, as being different from the ordinary run of outings, and as I was on the lookout for excitement of any sort, I eagerly agreed to join him in a trip to last the best part of a week, never dreaming of all that was to follow in the shape of a close shave from death.

"We both rode our favorite wheels, which, fortunately, were of the same make, thus doing away with the possibility of any dispute regarding the superiority of either. To our handle bars we had strapped a decidedly limited amount of baggage; our pocketbooks were sufficiently filled to meet all wants in that direction, and as both of us were in the best of health and free from worldly care, we went speeding along the highway in the best of spirits.

"'Sixteen miles to Midland Cut,' sang out Rexwell, as he slowed up at a guideboard placed where a wagon trail crossed the road. 'We ought to be able to make that by supper time with ease.'

"'It looks to me as if there was a hill back of yonder woods,' I replied, as I took a long look ahead.

"'It can't be much of a climb, or we would see it over the treetops, Bert. We'll soon know,' he went on, as he forged ahead by an extra spurt, giving me some quick work on the pedals to catch up to him.

"It was a little after four in the afternoon, or evening, as the residents of some localities termed it. The fore part of the day had been somewhat oppressive, the usual southwest breeze having died down by ten o'clock, leaving the glaring sun its full sway. Now I noticed a dense mass of clouds creeping and rolling up from over to our right, and drew Rexwell's attention to it.

"'By jove! that looks as if we were going to have a storm, Robert,' said he. 'Those clouds are rolling up fast, too. We must strike shelter before we get wet to the skin.'

"We crossed the polished tracks of the railroad and descended into the woods. The road was not sufficiently used to clear it of its overhanging branches, which more than once struck us in the face as we bowled along. Before the heavy growth was passed, the sun was obscured, and we heard the distant roll of thunder.

"We pressed on faster than ever, only to find ourselves at the foot of an extra steep hill, at the entrance to another dense patch of timber. Here the way was rather soft, and we were glad enough, after a few minutes more of riding, to leap down and trundle our wheels beside us.

"Pat, pat, pat, patter, patter! It was the rain, striking the leaves overhead, and soon some came down upon our heads. Up at the top of the hill was an opening, and there the drops seemed to be coming down in a deluge. The thunder now increased, accompanied by occasional flashes of lightning.

"'We're in for it, old man,' said Rexwell, dismally. 'What had we best do? seek shelter among the trees?'

"'If you're not afraid of being struck by lightning,' I replied; and then the pair of us made a break to where a clump of trees stood, their branches tightly interlaced. This spot reached, we crouched down in a hollow, and I brought out my rubber blanket and made of it an apology for a tent, by throwing it over our bicycles.

"Hardly had we become settled than we heard the sounds of horses' hoofs on the road. Looking forth we beheld four horsemen dash into view. All were drenched with rain and one was muttering savagely at his ill-luck.

"'Come on in here, boys; we can stay under the trees until the worst is over,' we heard the leader of the quartet remark; and he turned in not fifty feet from where we crouched. 'Ricketts, be sure and keep that dynamite dry,' he added, to the man who had been doing all the grumbling.

"'Oh, that's all right—I wish I was as dry,' responded Ricketts. 'Hang such a night as this is going to be!'

"'You're crazy, man, to grumble,' put in a third of the party 'Why, we couldn't have it better. The railroad people will never be able to follow us.'

"'That's all you know about it, Larson. Mud leaves an ugly trail,' growled Ricketts. 'Ain't that so, Shorer?'

"'We can follow the creek from Weemer's, and that will throw 'em off the scent,' responded the leader. 'All we'll have to do is to stop the train this side of Blowfen's instead of the other. By the way, keep your ears open for Jamison and the others. We don't want them to go below Blowfen's by mistake.'

"'I'm watching, all right,' said Larson. 'Ain't he got my gun?'

"'Yes, and Lewis promised to bring me some .42 cartridges, too,' said Ricketts. 'Refley sold me a lot of .38's by mistake. When will the express get to Blowfen's?'

"'Eight-fifteen, or thereabouts. We must be on the watch at eight,' came from the leader of the quartet. 'And I want every one of you to do the right thing. If you don't, that twenty thousand will slip through our fingers, and we may get our necks stretched instead.'

"A clap of thunder broke off the conversation at this point, and when the reverberations rolled away, it was not resumed. The horsemen had gathered under some trees to the right of us, and now occupied their time in watching for their comrades and in examining the arms and other traps which they carried.

"I had listened to their talk in rising horror, and the clutch Rexwell took upon my arm told me plainly that he was not less affected. As the thunder died away, he whispered hoarsely into my ear: 'Train wreckers!'

"I looked at him and nodded. 'They are going to wreck the express to-night, too,' I added in a whisper.

"'We must stop them.'

"Yes, that was plainly our duty. But how was the deed to be accomplished? We were only two to four, or more, and our small pocket arms woul' prove of small value should we expose ourselves and provoke a 'mix-up.'

"'That Shorer is the notorious train wrecker from Scotland,' said Rexwell. 'There is a reward up for his capture, I think.'

"'Let's effect his capture, and collar the reward,' I cried eagerly.

"'Hush, Robert! Collar the reward! If they found us here they wouldn't hesitate to fill us full of holes. That Shorer is as cold-blooded as they make them.'

"'If we could get away without being seen, we might ride back to Wheatland and inform the authorities.'

"'Providing we could get there before the express goes through.'

"'To do that, we'll have to get out at once.'

"A noise on the road made us break off. The rest of the train wrecker's gang were coming up—six stalwart and bronzed men, each on a powerful horse, and all heavily armed. The ten horsemen made an imposing cavalcade.

"Silently I took down the rubber blanket and rolled it up, strapping it fast in its place. Seeing this, Rexwell felt of his machine and examined the pedals and running gear.

"'Follow me,' I whispered; and lifting my bicycle from the hollow, I darted behind the clump of cottonwoods, and hurried through the woods in a direction parallel to the highway. My chum came close behind me. Inside of ten minutes we were several hundred feet away, and then we turned into the road, mounted to our saddles, and pedalled down the back track as rapidly as our weary legs and the state of the muddy highway would permit. Once we fancied we heard a shout from behind, but we never looked back and nothing followed.

"It was still raining; not as heavily as before, but still sufficiently to reach our skins and ren-

der us far from comfortable. The wet bushes and tree branches slashed in our faces, and twice both of us ran into hollows and took nasty headers. But we minded nothing of it all, our one thought being to get to Wheatland ahead of the express. If we failed, we could well imagine what dreadful consequences would follow. If any one was killed in the hold-up, we would consider ourselves little short of being murderers.

"On, on, and still on we sped, the cold perspiration mixing with the rain on our necks and faces, our hearts beating wildly and our breath coming heavily. We were fagged out, yet we must keep on and cover the fourteen miles which still lay between us and the nearest stopping place of the express on the K. T. & B. railway.

"As we reached the top of a hill and sped like rockets down the opposite slope, Rexwell forged ahead in a truly reckless fashion. I had just started to call to him to be careful, when I heard a crash, saw his machine bounce up in the air, and he went sailing into a lot of brush. Luckily I avoided the rock he had struck, and slowing up as quickly as possible, I dismounted and went to his assistance.

"The wind had been knocked out of him, but no bones were broken, and when I reached his side he was struggling to rise, his face and hands

scratched in a dozen places, from which the blood streamed freely.

"'How's my bike?' were his first words; and I picked the machine up, to discover the front tire collapsed and the wheel twisted in two places.

"'That settles it; I can't ride any further tonight,' he groaned. 'You'll have to go it alone, Robert.'

"'And leave you?' I answered, quickly.

"'Yes, why not? I can take care of myself. I'll get to Wheatland somehow, by morning. Or you can send a horse and wagon out to meet me. Now, hurry up.'

"It would have been useless to argue with Rexwell, even had I felt inclined to do so, which was not the case; so with a cheering word, I went on alone through the wet and the gathering darkness.

"It was a solitary ride I shall never forget. I stopped once at the foot of a second hill, to light my lamp, and that was the only time I dismounted until I wheeled into the outskirts of Wheatland, panting for breath, my eyes bulging out of their sockets from the tremendous strain to which they had been subjected in the gloom, and my legs aching so greatly that I could scarcely stand upon them.

"'Show me the nearest way to the depot,' I

cried to the first person I met; and receiving the directions, sped on through the mud until the end of the long platform was reached. With awful distinctness I heard the clear whistle of an incoming locomotive, and heard the clanging of the bell. It was the express sliding into the station. I fairly tumbled from my bicycle and lumbered forward as the long train slowed up. The engineer was looking back from his seat in the cab, as I came closer and called to him:

"'For heaven's sake, don't go ahead yet!' I gasped. 'You'll be wrecked if you do.'

"'What's that?' he cried, and as I repeated my words he leaped down and caught me by the arm. I was soon surrounded by a crowd, consisting of the engineer, fireman, conductor and half a dozen of the train and station hands. Everyone listened to my story with close attention.

"'Hank Shorer means to keep his word,' said the engineer. 'He vowed four years ago to do me and the express. Where's the head constable?'

"The officer was not at hand, but soon a posse of men from town were marshalled together under the leadership of the conductor, a man of fifty, with an iron will and, so I was told by an outsider, one who could shoot as straight as anybody in the country.

"Tired out as I was, I still could not resist the temptation to board the train as a passenger, after sending a man with a wagon back for Rexwell.

"We pulled out of the station with exactly twenty-six armed men on board. In the cab were the engineer and the fireman, each with a rifle at his elbow. It was still raining, although not as heavily as before.

"Down the glistening tracks pounded big No. 657, which had drawn the express for three years. Women and children had been left behind, and the face of each man bore a look of determination and alertness. They meant to teach the train wreckers a severe lesson, and, if possible, break up the notorious gang which had terrorized the country for many months.

"The flash of a red light ahead! It was the signal to halt. The engineer set his teeth. One hand went to the lever, the other to the gun. The struggle was at hand. The long train slowed up, and came to a halt fifty feet ahead of the spot where the danger signal had been seen.

"'Up with your hands there!' came the command from two masked men, who leaped aboard the tender and faced those in the cab. At the same instant the remainder of the gang surrounded the train and began to board the cars,

"A single shot rang out, followed by a dozen reports. Then came groans and more shots.

"'We've been betrayed!' yelled a voice from beside the coach in which I stood. 'Make for the hosses, boys!'

"It was the voice of Shorer. Hardly had he uttered the command, than the conductor of the train took careful aim at the man and pulled the trigger of his heavy rifle. There was a shriek, a half-leap into the misty air, and the career of the most notorious train wrecker in that section was closed forever.

"I was not left undisturbed. At the beginning of the encounter a bullet had shattered the window glass beside me. In return for this I used my own weapon, and succeeded in wounding one of the gang outside, in the leg. Five others were wounded, and the remainder ran off as fast as they could to where their horses were tethered in a nearby grove.

"'To the horses!' cried one of the posse from Wheatland, and a rush was made for the express coach, in which half a dozen trusty animals had been brought along. A gangplank was put out, the horses brought forth, and in less than three minutes the riders were in the saddle and in hot pursuit of the fleeing criminals.

"The dead body of Shorer was picked up and taken on board, along with his wounded com-

rades. On the run back to town one of the wounded men died. The others were taken to the county jail.

"By the time Rexwell arrived, I had cooled off somewhat, although I was still far from being thoroughly calm. Both of us were surrounded, and we had to tell our story from beginning to end.

"By nightfall of the next day the horsemen came back with two additional prisoners, who were also jailed. The others of the gang escaped for the time, though I have since heard that they were captured out in Wales.

"For the part we had played in the memorable incident narrated, Rexwell and I were well rewarded, both by the railroad and the express company. But, while the reward was a highly acceptable one, I had no desire for another such adventure while touring on my wheel."

CHAPTER VIII.

A FIRE AT SEA.

"WELL, that's one of the greatest bicycle stories I ever heard!" cried Dick, when Robert Menden had concluded. "I reckon those train wreckers deserved their fate."

"I don't like to think of the affair, to tell the truth," replied the Englishman. "For a good many nights after it happened I scarcely slept a wink."

"I believe you," put in Leander. "No wonder you gave up wheeling. Anyway, it isn't as popular in England as it is here, is it?"

"Hardly; although you see more wheels in England every day," concluded Robert Menden.

Old Jacob had listened to the story with as much interest as any of the boys. "Tell ye what," he said, reflectively, "he kin spin a yarn slicker nor most sailors kin, an' thet's saying a whole lot," and Dick agreed with the old tar.

The next day as the wind died down a bit, the boys went fishing in earnest. They used several kinds of bait, and were rewarded with sev-

eral bass, two bluefish and several other specimens of the finny tribe, all of which were turned over to Danny.

"Dat's enough fish fer a week," was the Irish lad's comment. "Ain't dat bluefish a stunner!" and he held up the catch which had been brought in on Leander's line. The bluefish was done to a turn for supper, and never had anything tasted more delicious.

The boys had brought their faithful old dog, Dash, along, and this animal came in for a good share of attention.

"You see, we couldn't think of leaving him behind," explained Dick to the Englishman. "He went with us on that other outing, and he's as much a member of the club as Danny or any of us;" and Dash stood by, and wagged his tail, as if he understood perfectly what was being said.

"Dash and Dashaway!" laughed Robert Menden. "A good pair, truly;" and he patted the canine on the back. Dash took this very soberly, for he was rather slow in making new friends. But once a friend was made, the dog would stick to him through thick and thin, as Robert Menden found out later on.

Old Jacob and the others had studied the chart closely, and a direct course had been mapped out for San Juan, the capital city of

Porto Rico, situated nearly in the center of the northern coast. This course would take them close to the great Bahama Bank and past many of the Bahama Islands.

"Are you sure you know the course?" questioned Dick of the old tar. "You know we don't want to be smashed up on some hidden rock."

"I know every mile of the way," returned old Jacob. "Don't ye fear, lad, but what I'll git ye through in safety;" and this speech relieved Dick a good deal, for he understood only too well how dangerous were the waters they were now sailing.

As they proceeded on their course, the boys questioned Robert Menden regarding the location of the caves, one which was supposed to contain the treasure.

"They are almost directly south of San Juan," said the Englishman. "The distance must be twenty or twenty-five miles. I think we can learn all we want to know on that score when we reach San Juan."

"Well, we can't get there any too quick for me," put in Bob. "I'm just crazy to locate that money box."

"I understand there is a grand military road from San Juan on the north to Ponce on the south," observed Leander. "The road travels over mountains over four thousand feet high.

More than likely this road passes near the big caves."

For two days the wind blew at a lively rate and then toward night it seemed to die out utterly. They were now down to 24° north latitude, and the atmosphere was stifling.

"Finding that treasure is going to be hot work," observed Dick, as he mixed glasses of iced lemonade for himself and the others. "I reckon we'll earn what we get."

"How would you like to sail up to the frozen North?" suggested Leander.

"Well, we stood the ice and snow all right enough last winter."

"So we did. But still, I don't mind this so very much."

By nine o'clock in the evening all hands were ready to retire. But it was Bob's trick on deck, and after receiving careful instructions from old Jacob as to how he should keep the yacht headed, he was left to himself.

There was no moon, but the sky was clear, and countless stars shone down upon the polished deck of the Dashaway, so that everything could be seen quite clearly.

"Four hours of this will just about do me," thought Bob. He did not wish to own up to being sleepy, and to keep his eyes open he began to whistle softly to himself.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the whistle died out and the boy gave a long yawn. Oh, if his trick would only come to an end! He knew that once in his bunk he would go fast asleep in less than a minute.

A few minutes more passed, and the tired boy leaned up against the brass-bound wheel. Then he straightened up and tried to whistle again. But the note died on his lips and then—he knew no more.

Bump! The shock awoke everybody on board, but no one quicker than old Jacob, who slept, as Dick expressed it, "with one eye open."

"What's the matter?" roared the Yankee tar, as he tumbled on deck, minus his shoes and the greater portion of his wearing apparel. "By gosh, Bob, ye air running her on the rocks!" and he ran with might and main for the wheel.

The shock had also aroused Bob, but the youth was too bewildered for a few seconds to do more than stare helplessly about him.

"Why—er—what—" he began, when the sight of a long line of breakers, coming over some hidden rocks dead ahead, almost paralyzed him.

He tried to throw the Dashaway over to starboard and then over to port, and the consequence of the two movements was to send the craft straight ahead as before.

"Down with the mainsail!" roared old Jacob,

and took the wheel from Bob. Then came a second bump, as the yacht slid up in the air over another rock. By this time all were on deck, only to be thrown headlong in several directions.

But each of the party understood that life or death depended upon his movements, and the mainsail came down with a bang. By this time the Yankee tar had the Dashaway well over to port, and he kept her hard down until she seemed to be turning a circle. The water was now boiling all around them, and a third shock was felt, although this was but a slight one.

"Can we get out of it?" whispered Bob. He could scarcely trust himself to speak. "If we go down it will be my fault!"

"We can try," returned old Jacob, shortly. "Now help put that mainsail up again."

Bob jumped in with a will, and as the canvas filled, a long tack was made, and the Dashaway proceeded to the south of the angry breakers and the rocks which had almost lured her to her doom. The boys and Robert Menden held their breath for fully a minute, when old Jacob announced that immediate danger was past.

"How in the name of goodness did ye steer in thar?" demanded the Yankee tar, when he felt in the humor to speak. "I didn't tell ye to do it."

"I—I—" Bob hung his head. "I'm afraid I dozed over the wheel, Jacob. I was terribly tired."

"Dozed!" roared the old tar. "Bob Hobart, I'm ashamed on ye, thet's what I am. Dozed! An' the Dashaway going ahead full split, ready to knock the hull bottom out on the rocks. Dozed! Well, don't ye ever do it ag'in, thet's all!"

"I never will, Jacob; rest assured of that," pleaded Bob. "I should have called somebody."

"Thet's it." The old tar turned to the crowd about him. "No dozing over the wheel after this," he said, sternly. "The fust one to do it gits—gits——"

"Gets fined five dollars and his dinner," finished Dick.

"He ought to have the lash," growled old Jacob. "We can't afford to allow it, nohow."

And it was several days before he could fully forgive Bob for his thoughtless action. My young readers can rest assured that no one on board ever dozed over the steering wheel again, day or night, whether they were close to shore or many miles out to sea.

Since throwing in his fortunes with them, Robert Menden had become quite a seaman, and he was always ready to do any work assigned to him. He liked to steer, and often took one

of the boy's places if that individual wished to do something else.

"I was brought up to work," he said; "and this life on the ocean wave just suits me."

"I like it myself," smiled Dick. "Still, I can't say that I would care to tie myself down to a sailor's life."

"Nor me, for the matter of that. But such a trip as this is very nice."

Nearly a week slipped by, and they were well on their journey, when Danny was taken sick. He was not bad enough to be in bed, but still he went about his work listlessly.

"I'm afther thinkin' I want a sight o' land," he said, with a sickly smile. "I wasn't cut out fer no jack tar, not me."

That night old Jacob was left at the wheel, the Yankee tar having slept the greater part of the afternoon and evening. It was a blustery night, yet Dick, who was very tired, went to sleep with scarcely an effort.

Old Jacob had been left on deck alone less than half an hour, when a howl from Dash aroused him. The dog came toward him and repeated the howl, in the most dismal fashion imaginable.

"What is it, old fellow?" questioned the Yankee. "There is no moon to bay at. Are ye gittin' sick to keep Danny company?"

At this the dog set up a worse howl than ever, and then pointed his long nose in the direction of the galley. Old Jacob looked in the direction and saw a thin curl of smoke issuing through one of the windows.

"Jee—rusalem!" ejaculated the Yankee. In a twinkle he had fastened the wheel and was running to the galley with all speed. As he ran, Dash gave a loud bark, glad that he had been understood. One glance into the galley was enough for Jacob Ropes.

"Fire! fire!" he bawled, with all the strength of his powerful lungs. "Tumble on deck, boys; the Dashaway is on fire!"

CHAPTER IX.

FIGHTING THE FLAMES.

Old Jacob's loud cries soon aroused everybody. The first person to come up from below was Don, who looked as pale as a sheet.

"Is the yacht afire?" he gasped.

"The galley is," returned the old tar. "We've got to work lively if we want to save the Dashaway. Come; man the hose pump, while I get some buckets. And some of ye lower the sails. To run into this wind will only feed the flames."

By this time all the others were on deck, even Danny coming up, his head bound around with a towel.

"It's in de galley!" he groaned. "I t'ought dat fire was most out!'

He, too, ran for water, and so did Dick, while Leander and Bob began to work, first on the mainsail and then the jib, which, in less than two minutes were safely stowed away, although in a hasty, clumsy fashion.

Luckily the hose pump was handy, and soon a small stream was pouring into the galley from

the window, the door having in the meantime been tightly closed, so that the fire might obtain no draught to feed upon. Then came old Jacob with some extra buckets, and a bucket brigade was formed by the old tar and Robert Menden.

It was hot work, and it must be confessed that everybody was thoroughly scared, feeling that if the fire once got beyond the galley, the yacht would be doomed.

"And what will become of us, then?" whispered Dick to Don. "We're completely out of sight of land."

"If the wust comes to the wust, we'll fill the small boat with provisions and take to that," said old Jacob. "But I think we can master these flames yet."

The sparks were now pouring from the windows of the galley at a lively rate, and soon a bright column of flame shot up.

"Dat's de pot uf grease!" groaned Danny. "I was so sick I didn't t'ink to put it away."

He was laboring as hard as any of them, working the hose pump with Don, who felt ready to drop with exhaustion.

"I'll go down in the hold and see if it's eating through the floor," said old Jacob, and disappeared through the hatchway.

All waited anxiously for what he might have

to say. They heard him crawling about with care.

"No fire yet," he yelled. "But plenty of smoke. Work lively, an' keep it up, lads!" And then all hands went at it with renewed vigor.

Inside of five minutes their labors began to show some effect. The flames died away and only the thick smoke continued to pour from the galley.

"All of you fill your buckets, and then I'll open the door," said Dick, and his instructions were followed. At the draught a slight flame went up, but a single douse of water put it out; and then the conflagration was practically over.

But neither old Jacob nor any of the others were satisfied, and procuring a patch of old canvas, the Yankee tar soaked it thoroughly and then went into the galley alone and beat out all of the remaining sparks. Then lanterns were lit, and all hands took turns at inspecting the damage which had been done.

"It's not so great as I thought," said Dick. "The stove is all right, and all we'll have to do is to put up some new boarding on the sides and ceiling. But wasn't it a narrow shave!"

"That's what it was," answered Don, soberly. "I don't want another like it."

"Nor I," added Bob, and Leander shook his head doubtfully.

"I wonder how it started," was Robert Menden's question. "Danny, can you explain it?"

"Sure an' I can't, sur, savin' to say that I was sick, an' maybe I didn't put the fire out very good, sur;" and Danny looked as if he had committed the greatest crime on earth. The origin of the fire was never fully explained, but probably Danny's view of it was correct.

The fire brought forth another lecture from old Jacob. "Ye can't be too careful, nohow," he said. "Ye want to see to it thet not a spark is allowed around. If the Dashaway had been burnt up, like as not most of us would have lost our lives."

"I am sure we'll all be careful in the future," said Dick.

"You kin bet I'll be on me guard, so I will," broke in Danny. "Dat fire most scared me into a fit, dat's wot it did."

The nights were now beautiful ones. A cloudless sky and millions of stars twinkled down upon the polished deck of the Dashaway as she bowled along before a steady breeze, which old Jacob declared was "jest about right, any way o' lookin' at it." It was cool, too, for that locality, and the balance of the trip promised to prove a most delightful one.

Passing along the Great Bahama Bank to the south of the Andros Islands, the course had been

toward Acklin Island, on the southeast, and then past Providence Island, straight onward to a course five or six miles north of the upper coast of Hayti and Dominica.

"We might stop along the coast o' Dominica," observed old Jacob, one day, as he surveyed the distant coast line with his long telescope.

"I wouldn't stop unless it is necessary for stores," returned Robert Menden. "Remember, we want to get to Porto Rico just as quickly as possible."

"We have stores enough to last us to San Juan. I saw to thet afore we pulled up anchor at St. Augustine."

"Then we'll go right straight through," decided Dick; and as he was the owner of the Dashaway, that settled the matter.

But going right straight through was not such an easy matter as anticipated. Early on the following day a heavy fog set in, and by noon it was so thick that one could not see twenty feet ahead. At once old Jacob ordered the jib taken in, also the topsail, while the mainsail was closely reefed.

"This is one o' the wust places in the world fer a fog," was the Yankee tar's comment. "Afore ye know it if we ain't careful we'll run on a hidden bank. We must keep a strict watch, and keep the fog horn blowing until the

fog lifts." And this was done, one and another taking his turn at the big horn until he was tired. Once, about seven o'clock, they heard an answering horn, which seemed to come closer and closer, but just as they felt they had good cause for alarm, the sound began to recede, until it was lost in the distance.

"This is reg'lar smugglers' weather," said old Jacob. "They love it, for they can land goods 'most anywhere, without the custom house officials being the wiser."

"Did you ever run across any smugglers?" questioned Don, who stood by.

"I did once—down on the coast o' Maine. They were bringin' in silk from Chiny, and I helped the revenue officers collar six o' 'em—strappin' big fellers, too. Three o' the crowd were shot in the mix-up and one o' 'em died in the hospital from his wounds. It was in that muss that I got that," and the old sailor pointed to a long scar along his neck.

"Excuse me, but I want nothing to do with smugglers," shuddered Don. "They must be a bloodthirsty set."

"Some o' 'em are, lad—yet they ain't half so bad as the wreckers—the chaps as sets up false lights along shore to lure a vessel to her doom, so as they kin loot her. Those are the chaps as ought to be hung, every mother's son on 'em!" and old Jacob shook his head decidedly.

It was not until thirty hours had gone by that the fog began to lift, raised by a gentle breeze which sent the Dashaway on her course as lively as ever before.

"Off once more!" shouted Bob. "Hurrah!" and the others joined in the cheer. It was calculated that two days more would bring them within sight of Porto Rico, at a point near Manati, a city located directly in the center of the northern coast, and but a few miles to the westward of San Juan.

But once again their hopes were doomed to disappointment. The wind lasted only until sunrise the next morning, then died out utterly, leaving the sun to boil down on the deck with more fierceness than it had shown for some time.

"Confound the luck!" growled Dick, as he gazed at the idle sails of his craft. "I wonder how long this is going to last.

"Why not whistle for a breeze," suggested Bob, slyly. "I've heard that will fetch it."

"All right, Bob, you whistle," replied Dick.

"I'll tell you what I'd like to do," said Don. "I'd like to take a swim before we go ashore at San Juan."

"Hurrah! just the thing!" cried Leander, throwing up his cap. "We'll all go in together!" And he rushed down to the cabin, to don his bathing trunks. All of the other boys followed, even Danny taking part.

CHAPTER X.

A SWIM NOT LIKELY TO BE FORGOTTEN.

"You want to be on the lookout fer sharks," observed old Jacob, as he watched the boys' preparations.

"Gracious! Do you mean to say there are sharks around here?" ejaculated Leander.

"I don't see any, but there may be, nevertheless. Howsomever, I'll keep my weather eye open an' give ye warnin', if I see anything suspicious."

"I don't want any sharks in mine," put in Don, and hesitated a long while before entering the ocean. But when he saw the others diving about and having a good time, he could not resist the temptation to join them.

It was jolly sport. The water was just warm enough to be pleasant, and the waves were so light that there was little or no danger of being pounded against the yacht's sides. They dove and turned somersaults to their hearts' content, and then Dick proposed a race, and an empty barrel was thrown out behind the Dashaway.

"Each boy must swim to the right of the bar-

rel and around it," cried out Robert Menden. "An extra piece of pie to the lad touching the rudder first on the return. Line up now. All ready?"

"Yes! yes!" was the cry.

"Then go!" And away went the five boys, shrieking and laughing wildly, while Robert Menden and old Jacob watched the sport with keen interest.

The barrel had floated all of a hundred and fifty feet away, so the race would be one of over a hundred yards. At first Dick was in the lead, but gradually Leander crawled up, with Bob, Don and Danny not far behind.

"I'm goin' to win dis race if I kin!" gasped the chubby Irish lad. "Dat extry pie is comin' to me, even if I has ter make it meself!"

"No, Danny, you'll make the pie for me!" laughed Bob, and forged ahead of all of the others.

At the turning point Bob led, with Leander, Dick, Don and Danny close behind. But now Leander began to play out, and at the barrel he paused for a second to gain his breath.

And then something awful happened—something that Leander will never forget as long as he lives.

Something cold and slimy brushed up against his legs and swiftly encircled them.

What the thing was, Leander could not imagine; but the yell he gave would have shamed an Indian on the war-path.

"Get out!" were his words, and he tried to kick the thing off; but his efforts were unavailing, and whatever it was, it drew about his legs closer and closer and then started to drag him under the surface of the ocean.

He yelled again; but his chums were too intent upon winning the race to pay much attention to him. "Come on, don't lag behind!" called out Dick. "You may win yet."

Before anybody noticed that something was wrong, Bob had reached the rudder post and had won. But now old Jacob was on his feet, and pointing excitedly to where Leander was clutching at the empty barrel and yelling at the top of his lungs.

"Somethin' is wrong with the lad," said the old Yankee tar.

"Help! help!" screamed the terrified boy. "Something has me by the legs and is trying to pull me under!"

"Is it possible!" cried Robert Menden. He turned to the old sailor. "What can it be?"

"Don't know—maybe a devil-fish," was the answer.

"Help! don't leave me to die!" came from Leander. He had slipped from the barrel, but now he clutched it once more.

As quickly as he could, old Jacob procured a life line and threw it toward the lad.

But the line fell short and Leander gave another scream.

"Throw me a long knife, and I'll try to help him," said Dick. "He shan't perish if I can help him."

"No, no, boy; it may cost you your life," shuddered Robert Menden. "All of you had better come on board as quickly as you can."

But none of the members of the Gun and Sled Club would listen to this. They had stuck together before in extreme peril, and they would do the same again.

"Keep up; we are coming!" shouted Dick, and having procured a long kitchen knife he swam toward Leander with all speed. Soon the others had armed themselves in a similar fashion and were following. Even faithful old Dash seemed to realize that something was wrong, and with a loud splash he, too, went over the yacht's side.

"They have grit, as you Americans would say," observed Robert Menden. "What do you think it is?"

"We'll know in a minit," replied old Jacob, and rushed for a gun.

By this time poor Leander was utterly exhausted. The thing about his legs was grow-

ing tighter and tighter and pulling downward so heavily that the barrel to which the boy clung was almost totally submerged.

"Save me!" he gasped once more. "I'm going down! It's pulling me under!"

"I'm coming!" answered Dick. "What is it? Can't you make out?"

"Something slippery and slimy. Oh, save me!"

"If it was a devil-fish we'd see something of it," thought Dick, and he dashed in and then under water. In a moment he had hold of Leander's legs and was slashing away vigorously with his knife—at a mass of drifting seaweed!

It was a tough job; but once Dick knew he had not some animal to contend with, or monster of the deep, he grew calmer, and in a minute more Leander was free, and the others were helping him back to the yacht.

Dick brought with him some of the seaweed, which was dark green in color and covered with a whitish slime which gave one a shiver to touch.

Poor Leander was too exhausted to stand, upon reaching the deck, and had to be assisted to the cabin, where he was rubbed down and put to bed.

All on board examined the seaweed with interest.

"It's alive; don't ye forgit thet," observed old Jacob. "An' if Leander hadn't been cut away by Dick, he would have been pulled under, jest as sartin as if he had been tied to a rope. Sometimes thet seaweed covered an acre or more of the ocean. I don't know wot the scientific name is, but us old sailors used to call it Old Nick's hot-bed."

"And a hot-bed it must make," put in Don. "I don't think I want to go swimming around here again."

"The weed winds around anything that it happens to touch, and then it begins to contract, and that pulls the thing down. Many a poor sailor has lost his life through foolin' with Old Nick's hot-bed," concluded old Jacob.

On the day following, the breeze freshened once more, and the Dashaway bowled along merrily. Toward evening all hands began to watch for land, but it did not appear. Yet about nine o'clock in the evening they sighted numerous lights clustered together almost directly south of the yacht.

"Must be the lights of Manati," observed old Jacob; and his surmise proved correct, and by morning they were running straight for the harbor of San Juan.

Now that the end of the long voyage was so close at hand, the boys and Robert Menden were

impatient to go ashore, and the time was spent in making preparations for the trip to the great caves near Caguas.

"We may have some difficulty in taking our guns ashore," said Dick. "In that case we'll have to rely, perhaps, on our pistols."

"You won't be hunters after game on this trip," smiled Robert Menden. "You'll be after something of greater value."

"But we'll have to go armed," put in Bob. "I've heard that Porto Rico is full of old-fashioned Spanish brigands."

"There are brigands, but not as many as you perhaps imagine," said the Englishman. "Our greatest enemy will be Joseph Farvel—if he turns up."

"And he will surely appear sooner or later," said Don. "We had better be on our guard against him and any followers he may have picked up."

CHAPTER XI.

THE CLUB ARRIVES AT SAN JUAN.

THE Island of Porto Rico boasts of but three cities of importance: San Juan on the north, Mayaguez on the west and Ponce on the south. The mountainous country back of the seacoast is dotted with hundreds of villages and hamlets; but the means of communication from one place to another are very poor, the best highway being the military road from San Juan to Ponce, a splendid bit of engineering, which, as previously mentioned, runs over mountains nearly, if not all, of four thousand feet high.

San Juan, the capital, is the principal city, especially so far as shipping is concerned, for its harbor is one of the best the island affords. The city contains about 30,000 inhabitants; natives, Spaniards and negroes, and foreigners from all over the world. It is wedged in along the shore, between two frowning forts of whitish stone and a long line of battlements, once kept in good order, but now fast tumbling into decay.

In the city itself there are two plazas; one at

the city hall and the other near Fort Christobal —both great meeting-places, in the evenings, for native dames and maidens, young and old men, and children. It is a merry crowd, that smokes, sings, dances, listens to the band, and otherwise amuses itself.

As the Dashaway came to anchor in the harbor, all the boys viewed the shore with interest. They could see row after row of the flat, square houses, set up in long blocks, with narrow and not over clean streets between. About every second house had its second story project over the first, and balconies were to be found everywhere, sometimes causing the street below to be little better than a tunnel.

"All ashore that's going!" cried old Jacob, and the small boat was lowered, and the boys and Robert Menden entered, along with their weapons and other traps, and then the Yankee sailor pulled them to the nearest dock.

Here a harbor officer met them, and a long conference ensued. Then the Dashaway was visited by the San Juan officials and inspected, after which the craft was assigned to a proper position in the harbor. It was at first thought to leave old Jacob in charge of the yacht; but at the last moment a native was engaged to watch the craft, and the Yankee went along with "his boys," as he was wont to call them.

"Now, lads, are you all ready for the trip?" questioned Robert Menden.

"We are," came in a chorus.

"Remember, you may have some dangers to face. Don't go if you would rather remain behind."

"Who's afraid," came from Bob. "I'm not."

"Nor I!" came from the others.

"I'm out fer dat hundred dollars wot was promised to me," put in Danny. "Just youse lead de way an' I'll be close in yer footsteps, see if I ain't."

Each of the lads had provided himself with a hunting suit, and a small pack containing a change of underwear, comb and brush, and the like. All carried a little money, which, in the city, was exchanged for Spanish silver; for it was correctly surmised that the natives in the interior would not take United States coin. To-day that is, of course, changed, and Uncle Sam's coin or paper money is as good as any.

The party of seven soon found themselves on the main street of San Juan. Robert Menden had made some careful inquiries, and without delay they set off for Caguas.

They had hired a native turnout to take them to the place, but the driver failed to turn up, and at last they set out on foot for the village.

The many sights to be seen at every hand were

very interesting. Here were the milk and fruit peddlers, each with his wares hanging from a yoke balanced over his broad shoulders. And here were funny looking ponies and donkeys with huge burdens strapped to their backs. Native carts were rather scarce, but occasionally one would come lumbering along, with its broad and almost solid wheels, and its team of oxen or cows. The driver would walk by the team's side, lashing them with a long whip and yelling at them continually in very bad Spanish.

The people also interested the boys. A large proportion of them were black, the blacks increasing in number as the seacoast was left behind. Most of the colored men looked friendly enough, but here and there could be found fellows of mixed Carib blood—tall, ugly looking creatures.

"I reckon they are the Porto Rican brigands," whispered Dick, as they passed three of the ugly looking Caribs. "I don't think I would care to meet them of a dark night along a lonely road."

"These people have good cause to be ugly," put in Robert Menden. "Spain has robbed the natives for years by taxing them to death, and I understand that in many places the church has fallen into disrepute because the clergy do

everything they can to get the money away from the sugar and plantation workers. It's really a sad state of affairs."

On they went, until San Juan was left behind and they struck the military road previously mentioned. The walking was all uphill, but the ascent was so gradual that they scarcely noticed it. On both sides of the road grew tropical trees of all sorts—palms, mangoes, guavas, cedar, mahogany, and that wood which can be found almost anywhere—hemlock. There were also plantains and great cacti, and over all trailed immense tropical vines. Close to the deep, black soil grew magnificent ferns, and such mosses as the boys had never before seen.

"Almost a paradise, isn't it?" remarked Don. "And how clear the air is—not half as hot as I imagined it would be."

"Jest you wait until noon afore ye speak o' the heat," returned old Jacob. "Old Sol don't git to work in earnest till about twelve or one o'clock."

They soon crossed a clear running brook, and leaving the bridge, Dick ran down to the water's edge to get a drink.

"Drink through your handkerchief!" called out Robert Menden.

"Through my handkerchief?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Because you don't want to swallow a lizard or worse. These waters are full of small animal life, so I've been told."

Dick did as the Englishman suggested. And he was glad of it, for while bending down he saw several tiny lizards or leeches swimming near at hand. "None in me, not if I know it," he murmured as he drew back. "I'll inspect everything that goes down my throat after this."

By noon they had covered several miles. The sun was out clear, and now the heat began to tell on them.

"I move we rest," suggested Leander; and this was readily agreed to, and they sat down under an immense plantain, covered with half ripe fruit—that fruit which we commonly know by the name of banana, although the real banana is red.

"Are there any wild animals in Porto Rico?" questioned Don.

"I'm sure I don't know," answered Robert Menden. "I shouldn't look for anything very large on an island of this size. All the large stock has probably been killed off by the natives."

"I reckon you'll find wild-cats here an' wild hogs," put in old Jacob. "An, let me tell ye

thet a real wild hog is about as dangerous as a wolf or a leetle bear. But it ain't likely thet any wild animals would keep themselves around such a road as this. They would take to the mountains and stay there, so long as they could git enough to eat."

The rest was not half over when Dick grew restless, and arose to take a look at his surroundings.

"I'm bound to see all I can of the country," he said, with a smile. "Will you come, Leander?"

"Certainly," was the answer; and in a moment more the two chums were strolling off.

"Be back inside of fifteen minutes," shouted Robert Menden, and both called back that they understood.

There seemed to be a fine grove of orange trees to the left of the road, and toward this they made their way, wondering if they could pick up any fruit fit to eat.

"It must be fine to have such fruit ready to hand," observed Leander, as they entered the grove. "I reckon the natives don't know the value of what they've got."

"They might say the same of our apples, Leander. I'd rather have apples than oranges —that is, I mean for regular."

"Oh, so would I. Don't they grow apples?"

"I don't think so—anyway, not such apples as we have up North. It's too hot."

They soon found that the oranges were even more green than the plantains, or bananas, had been. They passed the grove and came out on a rocky stretch, overlooking a little valley where flowed a tiny stream, glistening like silver in the sunlight.

"Beautiful scenery," murmured Leander, and Dick agreed with him. Then a flock of gayly-colored birds flew out of some brush to the right of them.

"If I only had my gun," cried Dick—for their firearms had been left at the resting place.

"Let us see if we can't locate their nests," said Leander.

"I don't want to rob their nests," declared Dick.

"Neither do I; but we might have a look at the kind of eggs they lay."

So the pair set off through the brush and over the rocks.

They had gone less than fifty yards when they came to a spot covered with long rushes.

"The ground seems to be shaky here," began Leander, when suddenly, without warning, the rushes gave way, and down plunged both boys out of the bright sunlight into almost total darkness.

CHAPTER XII.

PRISONERS OF NATURE.

"DICK!"

"Leander!"

"Oh, my side!"

"Oh, my leg!"

"Are you seriously hurt?"

"I—I don't know."

"I've had all the wind knocked out of me."

"Ditto with me. What a tumble to take!"

"What kind of a place is this?"

"A hole—a big, deep, dark hole. One of the caves, perhaps."

"Do you think it's a—a bear's den, or something like that?"

"No, I don't. I reckon it's just a common, everyday hole, or cave. The question is, how are we going to get out?"

"To get out?"

"That's what I said."

"Climb out, of course."

"That's easy enough to say, but just look up and see how far we are from the top."

They looked up. The hole was all of thirty-five or forty feet deep, and from ten to fifteen feet across. The sides were of dirt and rocks, covered here and there with wet moss.

Luckily they had landed on a pile of half-decayed leaves and tree branches, otherwise they must have been seriously injured. The rushes and some dirt had fallen all around them.

For a full minute neither spoke. During that time they examined the walls of the hole.

"We've got to get out somehow," said Dick, at last. "But to climb that wall seems impossible."

"Let us try it, anyway," returned Leander.

He found what he considered the best place, where several jagged rocks projected, and by digging his hands into the soil succeeded in pulling himself up a distance of eight or ten feet.

"Look out!"

As Dick uttered the cry he leaped back out of danger.

Down came several of the rocks, accompanied by a great mass of dirt.

Leander followed, to roll over on his back on top of the pile.

"Great Cæsar!" gasped the fallen one. "I didn't think I was going to pull down the whole wall over me."

"Don't try that again, or we may be buried alive," cautioned Dick.

"I don't think I will try it," was the rueful answer. "But, Dick, we *must* get out."

"That's true."

"Let us yell for help."

"I don't believe anybody is within hearing distance."

"Never mind, we can try it."

Both raised their voices, not once, but half a dozen times. Then they listened intently.

"Did you hear anything?" asked Dick.

"Not a sound."

Their faces fell. What were they to do next?

"If we only had a rope," sighed Leander.

"Or a long pole."

They walked around the flooring of the hole dismally. Then Dick drew out his watch and his face brightened.

"The fifteen minutes are up. They'll be hunting for us presently."

He was right; the others of the expedition were both hunting and calling, but nothing was seen or heard of them.

Led by old Jacob the party went through the orange grove, but came up a goodly distance to the left of the hole in which the poor boys were prisoners of nature.

Another quarter of an hour went by. To Dick and Leander it seemed an age. Again they cried out, but the top of the hole being smaller than the bottom, their voices were as muffled as though they were prisoners in a huge bottle.

"This is truly a pickle," groaned Dick, as he threw himself on one of the fallen rocks. "I must say, I'm stumped."

"So am I."

"I'm going to try throwing stones out of the hole," said Dick, after another interval of silence. "Anything is better than doing nothing."

Both boys began to shy out all of the stones they could pick up.

"We're really making the hole deeper," observed Leander, when suddenly the opening above them was darkened, and they saw a negro boy looking down at them with eyes as big as saucers.

"Hullo, help us out!" cried Leander, eagerly; but at the sound of their voices the negro boy took to his heels as fast as he could go.

"He's gone!"

"Perhaps he has gone for a rope."

"More than likely he was scared to death. He'll go home and say he saw a ghost."

Another quarter of an hour went by. Then they heard footsteps approaching, and two stal-

wart Caribs appeared. Behind them came the little boy, trembling with fear.

"Hullo!" repeated Leander. "Help us out, will you?"

"*Un Americano!*" muttered one of the Caribs. "How you git down dar?" he asked, in broken English.

"We fell through the rushes."

"Um—bad place dis to walk."

"So we have discovered. Will you kindly help us out?"

Both of the negroes nodded. Then they withdrew, to consult one with another. Presently they came back.

"How much give if pull you out de hole?" demanded the one who had previously spoken.

"Give?" came from both boys simultaneously.

"Ye-as, *Americano* rich boys, not so?"

"No, we are not rich," replied Dick in disgust. "But we'll pay you, don't fear."

"How much give?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"We'll give you a dollar," added Leander. "Gosh, but they believe in making money, don't they," he added, in a whisper.

"No take dollar," came from the Porto Rican. "Take ten dollar."

"Ten dollars!" gasped Dick, not so much over the amount of the sum, but because of the

"cheek" in asking it. "You don't want much, do you?"

"We'll give two dollars—we can't pay any more," said Leander.

But at this the Caribs shook their woolly heads. They were bound to make money out of the Americans' misfortune. Such a thing as being generous never entered their heads.

"Ten dollar, or we go away again," said the one who could speak broken English.

"We'll give you three dollars," said Dick.

"No, ten dollar."

To this the Caribs stuck, and at last the boys promised them the amount.

"But you have got to pull us out first," said Leander.

Even to this the negroes demurred, and in the end it was agreed to pay five dollars first, and the second five when they were safe.

Dick took some Spanish money and tied it in a handkerchief, which he threw up so that the largest of the Caribs could catch it. Then one of the natives ran off to get a long rope.

Getting up out of the hole by the aid of the rope was comparatively easy. As soon as the youths were on the top of the earth once more, each of the natives caught a boy and held him.

"Now pay udder five dollars to Bumbum," grinned the leader of the pair.

"Is your name Bumbum?" demanded Dick.

"Yes, señor."

"All right, Bumbum, here is the money, and let me say that I think you about the meanest Porto Rican on the island."

"Bumbum must earn his living, señor."

"I don't call this earning a living. What do you do, as a general rule? Lie about to squeeze strangers?"

At this the Carib's face darkened. "No insult me, or you be sorry!" he cried, and made a movement as if to draw some weapon from his bosom.

"Come, let us be going," cried Leander, in alarm.

"I'm ready," was Dick's reply, and they hurried off in one direction, while Bumbum and his companion, accompanied by the negro boy, stalked off in another. Soon the two parties were lost to sight of each other; but that was not the last, by any means, that was seen of the wily Caribs.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAYSIDE INN.

"WELL, well, boys, where have ye been? We've been a-huntin' high an' low fer ye!"

And so speaking, old Jacob rushed up to them, followed by all the others.

Dick told their story, to which the remainder of the party listened with close attention.

"It's lucky the Caribs came up," was Robert Menden's comment. "But they made you pay dearly for their services."

"It was downright robbery!" burst out the old Yankee tar. "If I run across 'em, I'll make 'em give up nine dollars o' the money, sure; mark my words on 't!"

"Well, I'm mighty glad we are out of it," said Leander. "I wouldn't want to spend a night down in that hole for twice ten dollars."

"Nor I," added Dick. "Next time I'll be sure where I am stepping."

They continued on their way until five o'clock, when it began to rain.

"No use of getting wet," declared Robert

Menden. "I move we seek shelter for the night."

This was agreed to, and they hurried on to where there stood a sort of wayside inn—a rambling, two-story affair, built of rough stone and whitewashed.

A tall and not overly-pleasant looking Spaniard received them, and soon Dick had arranged for supper, lodging and breakfast for the entire party.

The wayside inn was almost deserted, only the proprietor, his wife and a negro servant being present.

They were shown to two rooms in the second story—low apartments, but well ventilated—and here their host left them, stating that supper would be ready at seven o'clock.

The boys surveyed the apartments with interest. Each room was perfectly square, with its floor covered with a rough matting of sea-grass. The walls were bare, saving for one or two religious pictures miserably executed. The beds were old-fashioned "four-posters," covered with straw ticks and plain white sheets, nothing more.

"They don't need blankets," observed old Jacob. "A man can keep warm without half tryin'. Thet's why the windows ain't got no glass in 'em, an' there ain't no stoves around."

The rain continued to come down steadily, so that they could not roam about the place. After a general washing up, they went below, to find their host, Jose Maguel, snoring lustily in an easy-chair in the parlor.

"Half-past six," said Menden, looking at his watch. "I wonder what they will give us for supper?"

"He promised us chicken," answered Dick. "But it ought to be cooking by this time."

He walked through the dining-room and into the apartment that did duty as a kitchen. Beyond, in the yard, the servant was stirring up a small charcoal fire, built under a shelter of palm thatch, the sides being open so that the smoke and heat might escape.

Presently a negro boy hove into view on the road. He carried in his hand the body of a dead rooster. As he came closer, Dick saw that the fowl had steel spurs attached to his legs.

"A dead gamecock," he muttered. "I'll wager there has been cock-fighting somewhere, and Señor Maguel is going to dish us up the defeated fowl."

Dick hurried back to the others and told them of what he had seen. At once old Jacob grew indignant and rushed to the rear of the inn, where the servant was in the act of decapitating the dead fowl with an axe.

"We won't eat thet, consarn ye!" he cried, pointing his long, bony finger at the fowl. "We want chicken—good barnyard fowls—an' don't ye forgit it!"

The girl did not understand a word of what was said, but she understood his actions and stepped back, dropping the gamecock as she did so. At once old Jacob secured the fowl, and marched into the inn with it, and up to where Jose Maguel still sat snoring in the chair. A shake of the shoulder aroused the innkeeper, and he gazed in bewilderment when the old Yankee tar held up the gamecock before his nose.

"Do ye suppose civilized Americans air a-goin' to eat thet?" came from old Jacob, wrathfully. "I'd jest as lief eat crow. We want real chicken, killed fer the purpose o' eating, understand?"

"*Un Americano* no like dis?" queried Jose Maguel, mildly.

"No, we don't like it, not by a jugful. You give us real chicken."

"Dis chicken—good chicken."

"It's a slaughtered fowl from one o' yer cock-fights," roared old Jacob. "Like ez not, he's pizened from the other bird's cuts. Oh, I know all on ye do nothing but look at cock-fighting day in an' day out, much to yer discredit. We want good chicken, understand?"

"Yes. Señor shall have good chicken," growled the Spaniard; and inwardly very angry, but not daring to show it before so many strangers, he took the gamecock and passed into the kitchen with it.

"He'll make you eat it if he can," observed Leander. "He's mad clear through, I can see that."

"I'm going to watch him, lad, until the meal is on the table," replied old Jacob; and this he did, and made certain that they got a chicken which was caught and killed for that purpose. Cock-fighting is a national sport in Porto Rico, and it is a great trick to work off the slain fowls on anybody who does not know the difference, the natives rarely eating their fallen champions.

When supper was served it was by no means a bad meal, although all of the party had eaten better. It consisted of chicken, rice cakes, fried sweet potatoes, baked bananas, and bread and jelly, with strong native coffee. As they ate, the host sat by, but said nothing to them.

"We may as well retire early," observed Robert Menden. "We want to reach the vicinity of the caves by to-morrow."

"Did you ask the landlord about the caves?" queried Don.

"I mentioned them in an off-hand way, but

he said he knew nothing about them." And this, let me add, is not strange, for it is but lately that the caves have become known to the great majority of people.

"We don't want to let anybody suspect our mission here," put in Bob. "They might follow and rob us, you know."

"Thet's it," added old Jacob. "As long as we know about where the caves are, ye had better keep yer trap closed. I allers found thet it paid not to talk too much in a strange country."

Robert Menden had his written description of the caves with him, and before retiring, all hands pored over this, hoping by it to gain some clew concerning the box with the initials, M. M. M.

The rain continued to come down, but it did not lightning and thunder, and the gentle patter-patter on the roof acted as a lullaby to the tired boys, everyone of whom went sound asleep in short order. Then Robert Menden and old Jacob dropped off, and all became quiet in the two rooms which the party occupied.

How long he slept Don did not know. But he awoke with a start and sat up, not knowing what had aroused him.

The room was in semi-darkness, the smoky lamp being turned down low. All of the others were sleeping soundly.

"Dick!" he cried softly, but there was no reply from his chum.

"Bob! Leander!" he continued after a long pause. Still no answer, saving a long snore from Bob, as he turned over restlessly.

"It's mighty queer what woke me up," thought the boy. He usually slept well.

He dropped back on the bed and tried to go to sleep again.

But the effort was a failure, and though he lay back with his eyes tightly closed, he was as wide-awake as before.

Then, of a sudden, although he heard nothing, a peculiar sensation stole over him, and he became convinced that some stranger was in the apartment!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MAN IN THE ROOM.

Don shivered, but said nothing.

He felt positive that he was right—that somebody was moving around the room—yet so far he had not heard a sound.

"Can it be the landlord?" he asked himself. "If it is, what is he doing here?"

The bed in which the boy rested was turned in such a fashion that he could see but a small portion of the apartment in his present position.

As noiselessly as he could, he shifted about until the entire room was within his range of vision.

He was just in time to behold a shadow cross the doorsill and glide into the next apartment, where Robert Menden, old Jacob and Danny were sleeping.

Then a slight puff of air came in at one of the windows, extinguishing the smoky lamp and leaving all in total darkness.

"Wake up, all of you!" cried Don, at the top

of his lungs. "Somebody is here who doesn't belong here!"

At his cry one after another leaped up.

"What's thet?" demanded old Jacob.

"Somebody just entered your room."

"There he goes—out of the window!" ejaculated Robert Menden, and ran toward the spot, only to stumble over a chair and stub his toe so severely that he set up a howl of pain.

Old Jacob turned quickly enough to see the man's head as he swung from the window-sill to the ground below, a distance of less than twelve feet. In the darkness he saw the fellow, a native, rush away at top speed.

"Stop, ye villain!" he roared. "Stop, or I'll fire!" Then he ran to his bed to get his revolver, which had been placed under his pillow, but by the time he reached the window again the midnight marauder had disappeared into a wood opposite the inn.

"He must have entered the rooms for the purpose of robbing us," said Dick. "Let us light the lamp and see if anything is missing."

A match was struck and the lamp turned up as high as possible, and then they began an examination of their clothing and bundles. Only one set of trouser-pockets had been cleaned out —those belonging to Bob, who had lost a good knife, a bunch of keys and a couple of dollars in

Spanish small change. Nothing else had been disturbed.

"Don scared him off," said Dick. "Otherwise he would have gone through every pocket and package in the two rooms," and the others agreed with him.

"I'd like to catch the rascal," grumbled Bob. "That knife was a prize one and I don't want to lose it—nor the money neither."

"We would have a job tracking that thief in this storm," answered Robert Menden. "Let us be thankful the matter is no worse, and be more on our guard in the future."

The noise in the rooms had awakened the landlord of the inn and he now knocked on the door, demanding what was the matter. He drew down the corners of his mouth when told.

"The Porto Rico brigands, señors," he said. "Be glad they no knife you!" and he shivered.

"Perhaps," said old Jacob, laconically. "But maybe you are in with them," he muttered to himself, as he turned away. The gamecock episode still hung in his mind, and certainly the landlord's general appearance was much against him.

For the balance of the night one or another of the party was awake, and it was decided that in the future they should take turns on the watch, just as had been done on the yacht.

In the morning they had breakfast very early, having contracted for this beforehand. Had they not done so, nobody at the inn would have stirred before eight o'clock, and breakfast would not have been on the table until nine or ten. To many living in Porto Rico time seems to be of little value. Almost all of the business is done between ten and twelve o'clock in the morning, and after that the shopkeeper locks up his place and takes a nap until four or five o'clock, opening up again in the evening, which is really the busiest part of the whole twenty-four hours.

The storm had cleared off and now the atmosphere was sultry and oppressive, the evaporations from the forests going up like clouds of steam.

"Phew! this is going to be a corker!" exclaimed Dick, as he mopped the perspiration from his brow. They had covered less than two miles, and yet he felt completely dragged out.

"We'll take a rest when we come to a suitable spot," announced Robert Menden. "But we must push on all we can before twelve o'clock. Nobody will want to move a step between that time and four, mark my words."

Menden had scarcely spoken when a large flock of birds arose directly in front of them. The young hunters could not resist the tempta-

tion to take a shot at the creatures, and one after another fired their weapons, bringing down seven of the birds.

"Good enough!" cried Robert Menden. "I see that all of you can shoot, and I am glad of it, for there is no telling what will turn up before this treasure-hunt is over."

"Before I leave Porto Rico I want a little chance to hunt and fish," said Dick. "It wouldn't be a real summer outing without that."

"I'm out fer dat money dis trip," put in Danny. "Say, I hopes yer git about a million dollars, so I do!" and he shook his head enthusiastically.

"Don't speak of it quite so loudly, Danny," cautioned the Englishman. "This is a secret search, you know."

"Yes, dat's so—I forgot," answered the Irish lad. "I'll be as mum as an oyster after dis."

Coming to a bit of high ground overlooking one of the numerous valleys of upper Porto Rico, they sat down on several flat rocks to rest.

Robert Menden calculated that they were within a few miles of Caguas, and announced that the next night might be spent there.

"And then we must pick up some reliable native guide to take us to the great caves," he added.

The scenery from where they sat was truly

grand. Hills and valleys were clothed in every variety of tropical growth, from the tallest of royal palms to the heavy grass—grass the like of which none of the boys had ever seen. Far in the distance were the great mountains, ranging along for miles, their sharp ridges clearly defined against the blue sky. Smaller ridges came down toward them, the lower ones more smooth on their tops, and covered with great patches of grass, where fed cattle and sheep innumerable.

"It's certainly a charming island, so far as looks go," murmured Leander. "But I believe this atmosphere would make the most active man in the world lazy sooner or later."

"It's a good climate for invalids," said Robert Menden. "Some day Porto Rico is bound to become a great winter resort for Americans and others."

"I want to get to the top of yonder mountains before I leave," put in Leander. "If we—Great Scott! Look out!"

He leaped up in terror; and small wonder, for from under the flat rock a serpent, all of seven feet long, had glided. Now it raised its head and showed its cruel fangs, as if to strike at one or another of the startled party.

CHAPTER XV.

A LIVELY FIGHT WITH A SERPENT.

"A SNAKE!"

"Kill it, somebody!"

"Run, before it strikes you!"

Such were some of the cries which rang out, as all started to secure places of comparative safety.

Then a pistol shot rang out. The report came from old Jacob's weapon, but the bullet passed over the serpent's head.

By this time all had crowded to the edge of the little opening.

Behind them was a series of jagged rocks, the climbing of which would be no easy task. In front was a cliff overlooking the valley, and on one side were heavy bushes.

The only escape, therefore, lay to their left. But here was where the snake had located itself, as if to make them prisoners.

"We're in a pickle," groaned Dick, as he drew his own pistol. Bang! went the weapon, and the bullet clipped the reptile's tail.

The wound enraged the serpent, and it

slashed right and left with pain. Then it raised its head once more and darted straight for Dick.

Its eyes blazed like twin diamonds, and it may truthfully be said that for a moment the owner of the Dashaway was dazed.

But now a most unexpected thing happened.

Dash had wandered off in the brush and been forgotten.

He leaped into view with a bound and coming up behind the snake caught it in the neck with his strong teeth.

There was a grating sound, and the head of the snake twisted painfully and then dropped limply.

"Good for Dash!" cried Don, and rushing up, he fired his pistol at the snake's body, literally cutting it in half.

Then Dash dropped the quivering body, and to settle matters, Robert Menden crushed the head with a sharp stone.

It was several minutes before anybody recovered his former composure.

"Dash am de greatest dog wot ever lived!" cried Danny, and hugged the canine around the neck. At this Dash wagged his tail furiously, as though he understoond perfectly. But strange to say, now the snake was dead, the dog could not be coaxed to go anywhere near it.

"He knew we were in danger," declared Bob. "Otherwise you couldn't have hired him to tackle a thing like that," and the others were forced to admit that this must be so.

No one wanted to remain in that locality, so they set off once more without further delay. The road was now steeper than before, and by the time Caguas came into sight, everybody was fagged out and glad to think that traveling for that day had come to an end.

The appearance of the town was a disappointment to them. Caguas contains but five thousand inhabitants, mostly Caribbean negroes, and there are only a few buildings of fair size. The other shelters are mere huts, stretching along irregular streets, which are dirty in themselves and piled high with the refuse of years.

"The people here must be dirt poor," observed Don. "Gracious! I never thought to see such poverty—and with so much good land around that might be cultivated."

"Many of the folks won't work, no matter how hard ye drive 'em," answered old Jacob. "They live by stealin' their neighbors' fruit, and when they want anything from San Juan or Ponce they go into the woods, pick a bag or two o' cocoanuts, and take 'em along on a pony to trade with."

"Which goes to prove that it's not a good thing for nature to provide a man with too easy a living," laughed Dick. "Real labor would be the making of lots of these natives."

To find proper accommodations in Caguas was not an easy matter. There was a small hotel, but this had been visited by fire and no rooms were to be had there.

"I will take you in," said a native, who met them. "My house is the cleanest in the village, señors. Come;" and they followed him almost to the outskirts.

The native's name was Carlos Remora, and all found him "a pretty decent sort of a fellow," to use Robert Menden's manner of expressing it. He was a heavy-set mulatto and spoke very fair English.

"I travel to Florida once," he said, with much pride. "I show a man how to raise oranges. Stay dare two years, den come back here."

"Why didn't you remain in Florida?" queried Don.

"Wife no like it dare—she have all her family here. But now wife dead and Carlos Remora alone in de worl'."

As they had agreed to pay him well, the native provided an excellent supper, baking among other things some delicious cakes made of banana flour, with grated cocoanut on top.

There were but two rooms to his house, which was only a single story in height. He occupied one, with Danny and old Jacob, while the others of the party occupied the second.

But sleep was next to impossible. The house was certainly clean, so far as dirt was concerned, but it was alive with bugs, ants and other insects, for this portion of Porto Rico is overrun with these pests.

"Oh my!" roared Don, after he had been in bed less than an hour. "I'm being eaten up alive!"

"Ditto," came from Bob. He turned up the light. "What's this on the floor, spots of dirt? No, by gracious, they're moving! And look at the beds!"

"We've struck a bug colony!" put in Dick. "I reckon we're in for it for the balance of this night."

"I'm going outside and sleep on the ground," announced Leander. "If I stay here I'll get the nightmare, sure. Ugh!" And slipping on his trousers, he made a dash for the open air, and the others followed. Soon the owner of the house was aroused, but he could do nothing for them.

"My house best house in Caguas," he said, simply. "Nobody can stop de bugs an' ants. Must let dem run," and he went back to bed.

The boys and Robert Menden shook out their blankets and tried to get some sleep outside, under the trees, but were not very successful, and were glad enough when the rising sun announced another day at hand.

"And now for the treasure cave!" whispered Dick to Robert Menden, and the Englishman smiled and squeezed his hand in silence. The two had taken a great liking to each other from the very start.

Robert Menden had been talking confidentially with the native, and had come to the conclusion that the man could be thoroughly trusted. He now asked Remora if he knew anything of the caves.

"I have seen a part of the Dark Cave, which is on a plantation six miles from here," he said. "It is a bad place—nobody go dare for fun."

"And what of the other caves?" asked the Englishman.

"Udder caves little way off, all bad—no Porto Ricans go dare. Once two men go; one break leg, udder get eye knocked out by somebody in de cave."

"Got his eye knocked out!"

"Yes, señor. He in dark, when baf! something strike, an' he lose his eye. Werry bad place—better you not go down."

"Certainly we don't want to lose our eyes,"

was the Englishman's comment. "But will you take us to the entrance to the different caves? We will pay you for your trouble."

At first Carlos Remora demurred, but finally, when offered a dollar a day for his services by Dick, he consented to go along, and also agreed to take along enough provisions to last the whole party several days.

"Many tourists come on horseback," he said. "But the way is safer on foot. Horse may throw you in a hole."

Being assured that the climb up into the mountains would be a difficult one, they took their time in making their preparations for the departure. Bob had torn his coat and this was sewn up before leaving.

Leander was the only one to grow impatient, and stalked around urging the others to hurry. Then he started up the road alone.

He had not yet passed out of sight when they heard him utter a shout.

"What's up?" called out Dick.

"Come here—somebody is in trouble!" returned Leander, and then the whole party set off to see what was the matter.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE EXPOSURE OF THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

LEANDER had seen a man lying on the road on his back. Evidently the fellow was unconscious.

Over the form bent another man, and it was none other than Bumbum, the Carib who had taxed Leander and Dick ten dollars for pulling them from the hole.

As Leander uttered his shout, Bumbum raised his head, and then shook his fist at the youth.

But Leander was undaunted, and ran forward to detain the Carib until the others might arrive on the spot.

But Bumbum was not to be caught thus easily, and when Leander grabbed him by the arm, he struck fiercely at the boy and then tore himself loose.

"Where is he?" came from Bob.

"There he goes—the fellow who took the ten dollars from Dick and me."

"And who is this man?"

"I don't know, but I think the Carib knocked him down."

At once a rush was made to the spot where Bumbum had disappeared, and the wood and brush was searched thoroughly for a distance of ten or fifteen rods.

In the meantime Robert Menden had come up, and was gazing in open-mouthed wonder at the man lying in the road.

"Joseph Farvel!" he gasped. "What a meeting!"

"Is this Joseph Farvel, your enemy?" ejaculated Bob.

"The very same, lad. I wonder if he is dead?"

"I don't think so. But he got a bad crack on the head, that's certain."

Joseph Farvel lay in a slight hollow on the road. He had been hit over the left eye by some blunt instrument, probably a club, and the blood was pouring copiously from the wound.

Forgetting that this sour-faced man was his worst enemy, Robert Menden whipped out his handkerchief, soaked it in a nearby pool of water, and bound it about Farvel's head. Then he and old Jacob carried the sufferer to a shady spot under a tree.

In the meantime the others gathered around, and then Don uttered a cry.

"Bob's knife!"

He was right; there lay the knife beside the spot where Joseph Farvel had rested.

"It's mine, sure enough," said Bob, as he looked the blade over. He gazed at Robert Menden. "Do you think it was this Joseph Farvel who entered our room?"

"Great Cæsar! Perhaps."

"I believe it was that Bumbum," put in Dick. "I remember now that he cast longing glances at my pocketbook when I paid him that second five dollars. He is a regular brigand—or rather, a common sneak thief and footpad—and he probably tackled this Farvel for what he could get out of the fellow."

"I reckon as how Dick is right," was old Jacob's comment. He turned to the Englishman. "What do yĕ think is best to do concerning your enemy?"

Robert Menden thought for a moment.

"I don't want to leave him to die here," he said slowly. "That wouldn't be human. Cannot some of your party watch over him until he comes around, while I get out of sight?"

This was decided upon, and after some more conversation on the point, Robert Menden hurried on, accompanied by Dick, Don and Bob, leaving Leander, Danny, old Jacob and the Porto Rican behind.

It was fully half an hour ere Joseph Farvel

showed any signs of returning to consciousness. In the meantime those around the man made him as comfortable as circumstances permitted.

At last he opened his eyes and sat up.

"Where—what's the matter?" he asked, in a cold, disagreeable voice.

"You were struck down on the road," answered Leander. "Don't you remember?"

"I—yes, I remember being hit from over the shoulder. Who did it?"

"A native—we caught sight of him running away," put in old Jacob. "I don't believe you are seriously hurt, though."

"I don't know." Joseph Farvel gave a deep groan. "What beastly luck I'm having, to be sure! Did the native rob me?"

"You'll have to find that out for yourself," answered Leander. "We don't know what is in your pockets."

With some difficulty Joseph Farvel went through first one pocket and then another, and then he gave another groan.

"My purse is gone—and it contained over eight pounds!"

"You certainly had hard luck," was old Jacob's comment. "Where are you bound?"

"To the next village. I was—ah—roaming about these mountains, but I'm rather sick of it."

"The mountains seem to be very nice," observed Leander, dryly. "We are taking a look around, too."

"Indeed! Found anything of special interest?"

"No."

"It's a beastly island, and I shan't stay here long." Joseph Farvel staggered to his feet. "My head swims like a top!"

"I would remain resting for awhile," said Leander. "You are not strong enough yet."

"My boy, you don't know me. I'm stronger than you think for." The sufferer turned to Carlos Remora. "How far to Caguas?"

"Less than two miles, señor."

"I can easily make that before noon, and I might as well travel before it gets too hot."

"You may be attacked again," said Leander.

"I'll be on my guard, and if I am, I'll shoot the rascal. I am much obliged for what you did for me."

"That's all right."

"Always ready to help a gentleman in distress," observed Danny, with a wink behind Farvel's back at Leander.

"That's all right. So you are bound for the mountains. Beware of the holes, or caves, as some of the natives call them."

"We have this man with us as a guide," said Leander.

"Indeed! Well, take care, that's all I have to say, and good-bye to you," and so speaking, Joseph Farvel staggered off, but at a rapid gait.

"He certainly has grit," whispered Leander. "He's a bad man to have for an enemy. What wicked eyes!"

"Jest so," said old Jacob. "He wouldn't hesitate to heave a man overboard, an' I know it. Menden must keep his weather eye open."

The party resumed their march up the mountain side, and at the first turn joined the others behind a large, projecting rock.

The Englishman listened with interest to all that they had to tell.

"I'd give a good bit to know if he has discovered anything," he observed. "Being in such a hurry to get to Caguas makes me a little suspicious. Perhaps he has located the treasure, and now wants to make arrangements for getting it away."

"He can't have been here so very long," put in Don. "We came through as fast as we were able."

"I told you he would want to put his hands on that gold as soon as he could. But come, there is no use in wasting time here."

Up and up they went, along a twisting and turning trail, now broad, and then again so

narrow, that Dick wondered how a horse might find his way without slipping. Yet the native assured him that horses sometimes came that way with heavy burdens on their backs.

"Da get use to it, señor," he added. "But him bad—sometimes fall an' go dead." And Dick believed him.

The first range passed, they began to descend into a valley. Here the oranges, bananas and other tropical fruit grew in profusion, and in the brush could be seen numerous wild coffee berries just turning a beautiful red. The boys tasted them, to find them very bitter; "not a bit like cooked coffee," as Don put it.

"It's the ripeness and roasting that brings out the flavor," said Robert Menden.

Presently they came to a mountain torrent, all of twenty feet wide and ten to twelve feet deep. There was no bridge, but a large palm tree lay from bank to bank, and over this they made their way, one following the other.

"What about horses here?" questioned Leander. "You don't mean to say they walk this sort of a tight-rope."

"No, horses go up de water and walk on rocks," answered Carlos Remora.

Danny was the last to set foot on the tree, the others being some distance ahead. He was over the very center of the stream when a large

bird, flying from some nearby bushes directly past his face, startled him. He uttered a yell, and turning around, the others were just in time to see him slip from the tree and disappear with a splash into the swirling stream below.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH DANNY IS RESCUED.

"DANNY has fallen into the river!"

"Danny! Danny! can you save yourself?"

"The little fellow will be drowned!"

"He shan't be drowned, not if I can help it," burst out Bob. He had not forgotten how Danny had saved him from harm, while they were skating on the lake at home the winter before.

He sprang toward Carlos Remora, who carried over his shoulder one of the long ropes which Robert Menden had requested should be taken along, for possible use in the caves to be visited.

At one end was a loose noose, and holding this in readiness, he ran some distance below the spot where the Irish lad had disappeared.

The others followed him, but Dick thoughtfully took to the other side of the watercourse, thinking that perhaps he might be able to render additional assistance from that point.

All realized Danny's peril. His friends

knew that he could swim, but swimming would be of small help in that rushing, roaring torrent, with its sharp rocks and snags of fallen trees. Should his head strike on one of the rocks they felt that all would be over.

The banks of the stream were several feet high, of broken stones and black dirt, and to get down to the water's edge was not easy.

Yet Bob was undaunted and leaped straight down, at the risk of a broken or twisted ankle. Danny must be rescued at any cost.

"Danny! Where are you?"

One and another uttered the cry, but no answer came back. The truth was, that the Irish lad had been carried so far under that his head had struck, and now he was more than half unconscious and unable to do more than gasp for breath, and that meant to merely take in water.

"There he is!"

It was Don who uttered the cry. He pointed to the center of the stream, where a fallen tree projected several feet over the surface.

The Irish boy was struggling between the half decayed branches, but was too weak to clear himself.

"He's going to drown as sure as fate!" muttered old Jacob. "Perhaps I had better go in fer him!"

"No, no; I'll go in!" cried Bob, and slipped

the rope around his waist. In a second more he had entered the water, which at this point boiled in a milky-white foam.

At the shore it was not over three feet deep, yet he found that it was all he could do to keep his feet. The bottom was of rock, worn smooth by constant rubbing. Out and out he went, foot by foot, until half the distance to the fallen tree was covered.

He was now up to his armpits, and could no longer keep his footing. With a dash he set out to swim the remainder of the distance.

Never had brave Bob undertaken a more difficult task. As though he were a feather, the force of the current carried him downward until he was almost past the extreme end of the half-sunken tree.

A wild splash and one hand caught the last branch. At first it looked as if he would be torn loose. But he held on like grim death, and slowly, but surely, pulled himself closer to where Danny rested.

"Oh, Bob, save me; please do!"

The Irish boy's words were scarcely intelligible. He had raised himself up so that his head was clear, but could do no more, and was in immediate danger of sinking back again.

"I'll save you, Danny; keep your courage," was Bob's reply, and coming closer, the youth

drew the Irish lad still further up, to a point of temporary safety.

Old Jacob and several of the others had caught hold of the end of the rope, which Bob had left with them. Now the rope was entangled about the half-sunken tree, and the boy had his hands full in trying to disengage it and support Danny at the same time.

"Be careful, Bob, or you'll both go down!" shouted Robert Menden. "That tree may not be as secure as you imagine."

The Englishman had scarcely spoken when there came a dull crack, and the upper portion of the tree turned over and disappeared from view, to emerge again twenty feet below the spot.

Bob and Danny were hurled headlong, and, caught in the foaming and raging torrent, went over and over.

"Pull on that rope!" yelled Dick, and plunged in to the rescue of his two friends.

The three boys came together at a spot where a small rock appeared several inches above the foam. All had hold of the rope, but Bob and Dick had to support the Irish lad between them, for he was on the point of becoming totally unconscious.

The others pulled upon the rope with might and main, and slowly but surely the human

freight came shoreward, at a point some distance below where old Jacob and the others stood.

At last they were at a point where the water was not over three feet deep, and Bob and Dick staggered out to a grassy spot and deposited Danny on his back.

The Irish lad's eyes were closed and he did not move.

"He's full of water, I reckon!" cried old Jacob, and forthwith began to roll the boy, and then held him up by the ankles. By this means Danny got rid of considerable of the element he had swallowed; but it was a good hour before he came to his senses, and then he was so weak, that travelling, so far as he was concerned, was out of the question.

A consultation was held, and it was decided that Bob, Dick and Danny should remain near the river until nightfall, when Carlos Remora would bring the rest of the party back, unless, of course, something of importance was discovered.

The boys were left some provisions and their firearms, and soon Don, Leander and the others were out of sight.

As the three who had been in the stream were sopping wet, it was decided by them to take off their clothing and let it dry by hanging on some bushes in the hot sun.

In the meantime Dick built a small fire and made a pot of hot coffee, of which all partook with great satisfaction, along with several sandwiches.

"Sure an' I t'ought I was a goner," said Danny, when he felt strong enough to speak. "My, but don't dat river run fast!"

"In a place like this, one has to have all his wits about him," answered Dick.

"I'll have me wits about me when I cross another tree bridge, dat's as sure as yer born," concluded Danny.

Among the articles they carried, the boys had several fishing lines, and while Danny rested, Bob and Dick baited with some land crabs they succeeded in catching, and threw into the stream to try their luck.

"I've got a bite!" cried Bob, a half minute later, and drew in his haul, a tiny brown fish weighing not over three or four ounces. "Not worth anything," he muttered, disappointedly.

A short while later Dick felt a jerk, and at once his line began to leave his hand rapidly. "Something big," he cried, and played his catch as skillfully as he could. Inside of five minutes the fish was landed—a speckled beauty of at least three pounds. It was no wonder that Dick was quite proud of it.

But fish were not plentiful in that stream, and at the end of two hours they gave up the sport, each having caught two of fair size and several little things besides.

"Dat fish would taste mighty fine baked on a red-hot stone," said Danny; and to please the Irish lad, Bob proceeded to start up the fire, and soon a fish was done to a turn. It was the largest of the mess, but their appetites were good and they ate all there was of it.

Toward sunset they began to look forward to the return of the others, but nobody put in an appearance, and once the great orb of day went down, it grew dark rapidly.

"I hope they return," observed Dick; and growing a trifle anxious, he walked from the hollow and up the road the party under Remora had taken.

He was gone fully quarter of an hour and came back in considerable excitement.

"I just caught sight of that Joseph Farvel," he announced. "He is on the other side of the stream with two negroes, and the three are making their way toward the tree bridge."

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRANGERS IN CAMP.

"JOSEPH FARVEL!" ejaculated Bob. "Did he see you?"

"I don't think so. The moment I spotted him and his companions I dove out of sight behind a rock. He and the others are carrying quite some baggage, including torches and several ropes."

"Then he is bound for the caves, beyond a doubt."

"True; but he hadn't any rope with him before, so I don't think he has discovered anything yet. More than likely he found out that he couldn't get to where he wanted to go without a rope."

"If dey is comin' over de bridge dey will see dat smoke," put in Danny, as he pointed to the fire—which was now burning low, but still throwing off considerable smoke.

Without delay Bob ran to the fire and kicked it out. But the mischief had already been done, and soon they heard Farvel and the two negroes coming toward them.

Their first impulse was to hide; their second, to stay where they were. "We have done nothing wrong—he can't harm us," said Dick.

"Hullo, my Irish boy!" sung out Farvel, as he caught sight of Danny. "What are you doing here?"

"Sure an' we're restin'," replied Danny, coolly. "How are ye afther feelin' now?"

"Oh, I'm first-rate again." Farvel looked at Dick and Bob. "Did you belong to that party I met this morning?"

"We did."

"I didn't see you."

"We left before you came to your senses."

"Oh, I see."

"Sorry we can't offer you any supper," said Bob. "We just ate the last of what was cooked."

"I've had my supper, thank you," was the short reply. Then the man's face grew dark, and he whipped a handkerchief from his pocket. "Will you tell me who owns that?" he asked, tossing the article over.

"Why dat's Mr.——" began Danny, and stopped short.

"Where did the handkerchief come from?" questioned Dick slowly, hardly knowing what to say.

"It was the one I found bound around my head this morning, when I arrived at Caguas."

"I didn't put it on your head."

"Do you see the initials, R. D. M?" And catching up the handkerchief once more, Joseph Farvel pointed them out.

"What of that? They are not my initials," said Dick.

"Nor mine."

"Dem must be old Rusher's initials," put in Danny, quickly. Dat's his name, Rusher Daniel March."

"Who is Rusher?" and Farvel's face took on a different look.

"You'll have to ask de captain, Mr. What's-your-name."

"My name is Joseph Farvel."

"Well, wot yer making all dis fuss about dat hankerchief for?"

"I know a man who has those initials—Robert Dascott Menden, of London."

"I suppose dare's lot uf fellers has dem same letters, an' why not? I'll turn dat handkerchief over to de rest of de crowd, if yer say so. I see yer got yer head plastered up now."

"What are you going to do with those ropes?" asked Dick, determined to follow up the advantage Danny's ready wit had brought them.

"That is my business."

"Oh, all right. Sorry I spoke."

"I want to know if you met this Robert Menden?"

"Perhaps I had better say that is my business, too," answered Dick, coldly.

"I believe you have met him, and that that is his handkerchief," went on Farvel, sourly.

"All right; think what you please. We did you a good turn this morning, but you are not making us particularly happy over it."

"Oh, if you want pay for what you did, there you are," growled the newcomer; and pulling a couple of silver dollars from his pocket he flung them at Dick.

On the instant Dick's face grew crimson, and he walked up to the man with clenched fists. "You are no gentleman, Joseph Farvel," he cried. "I have seen quite enough of you. The sooner you leave our camp, the better I will be pleased."

"And so will I be pleased," put in Bob.

"An' yer kin take yer money wid yer," added Danny. "We ain't so hard up as yer seem to t'ink."

"You don't dare to answer me about Robert Menden," burst out Joseph Farvel.

"We have no reason to answer any of your questions," said Dick.

"I'll wager all I am worth that he is with the rest of your party."

"And what if that should be true," put in Bob. "Hasn't a man a right to travel where he pleases?"

"Robert Menden has no right to be on the island of Porto Rico, and in this vicinity."

"Why not?"

"Because he is after something that belongs rightfully to me."

"He tells a different story," burst out Bob, momentarily forgetting himself.

"Ha! so you acknowledge at last that he is with you? Take my advice and beware of him."

"I would rather trust him than you," said Dick, bluntly.

"So he has poisoned your minds against me, eh? Very well, that is another score to settle with him. As soon as I catch him I shall have him arrested."

"What for?"

"It was he who knocked me down and robbed me."

"Nonsense; it was a Carib did that!" cried Bob.

"I do not believe it."

"If Robert Menden knocked you down, would he take the trouble to bind up your wound afterward?"

"He probably got scared, being afraid that he had killed me and must hang for it."

"You is away off de track," said Danny. "A big black feller struck you down—we kin all give our word on dat."

"I am not willing to take your word."

"Then you had better clear out and leave us alone," said Dick, sharply.

"Don't get too dictatorial, young man."

"I mean what I say. We did you a favor, and you have made yourself as disagreeable as possible. Now the sooner you take yourself off, the better we shall be pleased."

"Bound to make me your enemy, eh?"

"I think you have made yourself that already."

"Be it so, but—" Joseph Farvel paused. "Beware how any of you cross my path—that's all."

"Oh, pshaw! I never did like melodramatics," cried Bob. "The world is wide enough for us. You go your way, and let us go ours."

"Answer me one question. Are you travelling with Robert Menden?"

"We are resting at present."

"You know what I mean."

"We have nothing more to say," said Dick. "Now leave us alone."

Joseph Farvel's face grew blacker than ever. "Be it so," he muttered. "But remember what I said about crossing my path." And then he turned away, taking his two negro companions with him. In a few minutes a turn in the trail took him out of the sight of the three boys.

"I don't know whether we did right or wrong," observed Dick, doubtfully. "I reckon he knows now pretty nearly how matters stand."

"I wonder if he will meet Menden and the others on the trail," said Bob. "I hope not."

"If dey meet, dare will be a fight, an' I know it," put in Danny. "Dat feller is a bad egg, if ever dare was one."

A half hour dragged by slowly. It was now quite dark and the boys began to think that the others would not be back.

Suddenly a shot rang through the stillness of the night air, followed by two others.

"Gracious! what does that mean?" demanded Bob, leaping up.

"Perhaps it's the fight Danny mentioned," answered Dick, grimly. He looked at his pistol. "I've a good mind to walk down the trail and investigate."

"You may walk right into danger, Dick."

"I'll risk it. You and Danny remain here until I get back. There is no use in all of us going."

A few seconds later Dick was off on his mission.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

DICK felt that he must advance with caution, having no desire to meet Joseph Farvel again, if it could be avoided.

"I may be able to help Menden and the others more by keeping out of sight," he reasoned. "If a fight is going on, I'll try to tackle the rascal from the rear."

No more shots reached his ears, and only the cries of the night birds disturbed him as he advanced slowly up the mountain path.

It was a dangerous trail in spots, and he moved forward slowly. His pistol was in his pocket, but right where he could lay his hand upon it if necessary.

Dick had gone a distance of two hundred yards when he came to a spot where the trail appeared to split into two parts.

"Here's trouble," he muttered. "Which path shall I follow?"

Getting down on his hands and knees he made an examination of the dirt and the brush on both sides. By the aid of a match he made out

several footprints leading to the left. "I'll take that," he concluded, as the match began to burn his fingers and was dropped.

On he went again, the trail now leading over some rough rocks overlooking a second valley covered with thick timber. On the opposite side of the trail was a cliff, and the footpath was not over two feet wide.

How it happened, Dick could never tell afterward, quite clearly. He slipped and stumbled, and like a flash began to roll down the incline leading to the valley. Over and over he went like a barrel, and then came a drop, through some brush into a hollow filled with dead leaves and moss. In a few seconds he had travelled several hundred feet.

Beyond a rude shaking up, he was not hurt in the least; and as soon as he could catch his breath he picked himself up and tried to climb out of the hollow. All was pitch dark around him.

"This is a pickle, truly," he groaned. "I might better have remained with Bob and Danny."

But now was no time "to cry over spilt milk," as the popular saying is. He must get back to the trail somehow.

But getting back was not so easy. On leaving the hollow he became turned around in the

darkness, and it was not long before he was hopelessly mixed up. In his endeavor to pick his way up the mountainside, he plunged deeper and deeper into the forest, until all at once the full realization of his situation burst upon him like a flash.

He was lost!

Lost in that veritable jungle, which appeared to stretch out for miles on every side of him. The tall tropical trees were everywhere, festooned with monstrous vines, while below grew the dank moss and fungi, the home of countless beetles, ants, spiders and other insects. No wonder Dick shivered. It was a situation to make any heart quail.

"If it was only daylight," he thought. "But it's as black as ink, and I haven't got so much as a lantern."

He felt in his pocket. He had still two matches left and he drew them forth. Trying one, he found it had no head.

"Only one match that is good," he said, half aloud. "I had better find the driest kind of wood before I strike it."

He searched around for several minutes, for dry wood was scarce in a spot where all seemed so damp for the want of sunshine. At last he struck the match on a stone.

It flashed up, sputtered—and went out. In

vain he tried to light it again—it would not give forth a single spark.

For the moment Dick felt like crying; he had laid such a store by the looked-for light, which would give him a fire and make him otherwise comfortable. It looked as if he must spend the remainder of the night in darkness.

But then a new thought came to him, and he brought out his handkerchief and tore from it several small strips, which he pulled apart and rolled into a loose ball. Into this he thrust his pistol and pulled the trigger.

The report brought a blaze of light with it, and instantly the linen caught and blazed up merrily. Over the ball the youth held several small sticks, and then some larger ones, and soon had a lively fire, which he took good care should not die down for the want of fuel.

But the fire revealed nothing around him but the endless trees and jungle of vines. As the blaze flickered up it cast dancing shadows in all directions, adding to the weirdness of the scene. Dick had been alone before, but he had never felt so lonely in his whole life.

"If I ever get out of this, you won't catch me going off alone again," he thought. "What's to do next?"

That was the absorbing question; but the only answer he could give was to throw himself down

by the fire and fall into an idle speculation. He had not the least idea how to turn in order to find the trail again.

At last he grew sleepy and his eyes closed in a light doze, from which he gave a start, as a terrifying sound not far off reached his ears.

"Gracious, what's that?" he cried, and took out his pistol.

Soon the sound was repeated—a half grunt, half squeal—and then a dark object loomed up among the tree ahead of him. Two eyes shone steadily out of the darkness.

With his nerves at their topmost tension, Dick took hasty aim and fired twice. A furious squeal rent the air and into the circle of light staggered a badly wounded wild hog.

The animal made straight for Dick, as if to knock the boy down or bite him. But there was another cartridge in the revolver, and this finished the porker by cutting through his windpipe. There was a grunt and a dying kick or two, and then all was over.

The attack had been short, but Dick was ready to collapse. "I was afraid it was a bear," he said, in telling of it afterward.

On his former outings, the youth had learned how to skin and carve almost any animal, and now he drew out his clasp knife and went to work, more to keep himself awake than any-

thing, for he was afraid to go to sleep again. Some of the pork fat he threw on the fire, which now blazed up more brightly than ever.

Slowly the night wore away, until, looking at his watch the youth saw that it lacked but a short while to sunrise. Already the birds were tuning up, while the croaking of the frogs stopped as it grew lighter in the east.

As soon as it was daylight, Dick cut off several pork chops and broiled them over the fire for breakfast, washing down the meat with a drink from a pool in the hollow. Then he resolved to climb one of the tallest of the trees, to take a general view of his situation.

Climbing came easy to him, especially as the tree he selected had numerous branches, some growing quite closely to the ground. Once in the top, he was enabled to see a goodly distance on all sides of him.

Over to his left was the valley, with the river, where he had left Bob and Danny. To the right was the mountain, and almost in front of him the slope down which he had rolled so unceremoniously.

"Not a soul in sight," he mused, when some objects moving along the trail caught his eye. He watched them for several minutes and distinguished three men—a white man and two blacks.

"Can it be Joseph Farvel and his helper and guide?" he asked himself; and finally concluded that it must be the party mentioned.

He determined to watch them, to see how they would head. They were coming from the mountain, and as they came closer he saw that they no longer carried their ropes and torches.

Presently the three men disappeared, at the point in the trail which was nearest to Dick. He waited for them to reappear, but nobody came to view.

"It's queer where they went to," he thought, and continued to watch. At last he grew tired, and determined to see if he could not find his way back to where he had left Bob and Danny, certain that they would not go on until they heard from him.

Now that the sun was up it was an easy matter for Dick to strike a straight path. Before setting out, he cut off a good-sized piece of pork, satisfied that his chums would enjoy a change in diet.

Dick's journey took him along a bit of rocky ground and then through a deep hollow, where the brush was so thick he could scarcely fight his way along. Indeed, once he grew so tangled up he had to use his pocketknife in clearing himself, while the briars tore his clothing in several places.

"I want no more Porto Rican jungles after this," he muttered. "One experience is enough. If we ever lay hands on that treasure, it won't be worth any more than the trouble of getting it."

A number of birds were flying over his head, and had he been out for sport with a shotgun he could have brought down several bagsful of the saucy creatures, which even dared to circle directly before his face. But with Joseph Farvel so close at hand he did not deem it prudent to fire his pistol even in fun.

The end of the jungle reached, Dick came out into an open patch probably a hundred feet in circumference. It was covered with moss, and unsuspicious of danger he started to cross to the other side.

But the moss only covered one of the most treacherous of bogs, and the youth had scarcely covered fifteen feet of the distance than he sank up to his ankles in the sticky soil. Growing alarmed, he tried to turn back, only to find himself glued to the spot, and sinking deeper and deeper with every movement made to extricate himself.

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNPLEASANT TALK.

"WHAT shall I do now?"

Dick asked himself the question several times. Here he was up to the knees in the bog and unable to stir either foot an inch forward or backward.

In vain he caught at the moss around him. It came up in his hands, revealing only more muck, black, slippery and pasty.

"If I stay here much longer I'll be planted for good," he groaned. "Oh, I must get out somehow!"

He struggled again and pulled with might and main upon one foot. But as that member came up, the other went down just so much deeper, and in new alarm he set down both feet again, to find himself now almost up to his waist.

His struggles had disturbed several swamp crabs—dirty and ugly looking creatures, peculiar to Porto Rico and other West India Islands. They crawled all around him, hissing viciously and glaring at him with their hard, beady eyes.

When he shouted at them, however, they scuttled off as fast as their long legs permitted.

The time that followed was an age to Dick, who could not think of a thing to do. But he did think of something else—snakes—and wondered if any were at hand.

"If they come this way I'll be a goner!" he shuddered. Then he raised his voice and called out, not once, but again and again, until his throat grew husky from his exertions.

At last he heard an answering shout and his heart gave a bound of joy. But then it sank almost as much as before, as he saw Joseph Farvel approaching, accompanied by one of his black guides.

"Who calls?" cried Farvel, and then caught sight of him. "You!"

"Yes, Farvel. Please help me out of this?"

"How did you get into such a box?"

"I tried to pass over the moss, not dreaming of what was underneath. Will you help me?"

"Where are your companions?"

"I left them at the camp where you first saw us?"

"I don't mean the boys. I mean Robert Menden and those who went off with him."

"I don't know where they are."

"Where did they go yesterday afternoon?"

"I don't know."

Joseph Farvel's face darkened into that ugly look which Dick had before noticed.

"I want a true answer, boy!"

"I have told you the truth."

"You know as well as I what brought Robert Menden to this island and this locality."

"Well?"

"I want to know just where he went yesterday afternoon."

"I don't know. I wasn't with him, and I haven't seen him since yesterday morning."

"He didn't return to your camp?"

"I can't say that either. I left my friends, wandered off, and got lost in these woods, and I've been here all night, although not in this swamp."

"Humph!" Farvel mused for a moment and sat down on a fallen tree. "Can you tell me how Menden got to Porto Rico?"

"Aren't you going to help me out?"

"I will—if you'll answer my questions."

"He was picked up out of the ocean by some folks on a yacht, and those folks brought him to San Juan."

"Do you know what he had to say for himself when he was picked up?"

"He thinks he was shoved overboard from the steamship."

At this Joseph Farvel started, but as quickly

recovered, and gave a hollow, unnatural laugh.

"Robert Menden always was full of queer ideas. He was sick, and even the captain of the steamship thought he acted queerly. You know his story, but you don't know mine. What both of us are after here belongs to me."

"I guess it will belong to the first man who finds it."

Joseph Farvel grated his teeth. "It belongs to me—and I will have it. Now tell me where Menden is at this moment."

"I haven't the least idea."

"You want me to rescue you, don't you?"

"Would you be inhuman enough to leave me to such a fate as this?" demanded Dick, in horror.

"You got yourself in this box—I had nothing to do with it. How can you expect me to help you if you are not willing to help me?"

"I can do nothing for you, Joseph Farvel. But I would not leave a dog in such a helpless situation as this."

"I would—if the dog stood ready to do me an injury—and that is what you are ready to do, in helping Robert Menden."

So speaking, Farvel withdrew to a distance and consulted in a low tone with the Carib who accompanied him.

The negro nodded, and then both hurried

away through the wood at the top of their speed, leaving Dick once more alone.

If the youth had been downcast before he was doubly so now. He was up to his armpits in the swamp, and such a thing as getting out alone was entirely out of the question.

But now something welcome broke upon his ears. From afar came the bark of a dog. It was Dash, who had been sent to follow up his trail; and a few minutes later the faithful animal came into appearance from the direction of the wood where the boy had spent the night.

"Dash! Good dog!" cried Dick, and Dash came bounding toward him. Luckily the dog was not so heavy but that the moss would support him, although he had to move around with care.

"Are you alone, Dash?" asked Dick, and the dog set up a lone howl, at the same time pointing his nose into the air.

"Bring Bob, Dash! Bob or Leander, Dash. Bob! Leander! Run, Dash, go!" And understanding perfectly, the intelligent canine started off at a loping gait across the valley and over to the camp by the river.

To Dick it seemed that Dash would never come back. The sun mounted higher and higher in the sky until it poured directly down upon the youth. He was tremendously thirsty

and would have given almost anything for a drink of water.

He had sunk lower, so now only his head was above the top of the swamp. The water was beginning to collect about him, and he felt that before sunset he must drown, if he were not rescued. Oh, how bitterly he regretted having attempted to cross the quagmire.

What was that? Dash's bark again, and he set up a faint shout. Then he listened and heard the voices of Bob and old Jacob, and once more his hopes revived as by a shock.

"This way, Bob! This way, Jacob! Hurry up!" he called, and then his friends came into view.

"Oh, Dick, what a situation!" ejaculated Bob. "Can't you help yourself?"

"Not a bit."

"We must be a-doin' somethin' fer him, an' mighty quick, too," burst out old Jacob. "It's a lucky thing I've got this rope with me," and he pointed to a long coil suspended over his shoulder.

How to rescue Dick from his unpleasant situation was a problem; but the old sailor finally solved it by climbing a large tree which overlooked the swamp close to where Dick was a prisoner. Crawling far out on a stout branch, he threw one end of his rope to the unfortunate boy.

Dick caught the rope with difficulty.

"Can ye tie it under yer arms?" asked old Jacob.

"I'll try," was the reply.

It was a difficult undertaking, and by the time it was accomplished the youth was up to his chin in the dirty water which was collecting in the quagmire.

"All ready!" he shouted feebly.

At once old Jacob began to pull away. "Wish I had a single tackle," he panted. "A straight haul o' this sort ain't no easy job."

Bob had climbed into the tree to help him, yet he could do but little, old Jacob being afraid that the limb would break down with their combined weights, added to the strain from the rope, which was now drawn as tight as a washline.

"Perhaps it will break," shouted Dick, warningly; but the rope had been selected with great care, and it held well. A long pull, and Dick began to leave the quagmire, the rope pressing against him as if to cut him in two.

"Hurrah! he's coming!" shouted Bob, presently, and he was right. With a sudden sucking sound, Dick left the muck and water behind, and then, held up by the rope, stepped quickly to a place of safety; and the rescue had been accomplished.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SEARCH FOR THE SPANISH TREASURE.

For a quarter of an hour after reaching a place of safety Dick could only lay on the ground panting for breath and trying to regain his strength.

His lower limbs were cramped and swollen, and when he finally stood up, his feet felt as though a thousand needles were piercing them.

"Never mind; you'll be all right by to-morrow," said old Jacob, kindly. "I'm glad we found ye in time."

"So am I, Jacob. I think, though, that Dash deserves a good bit of praise;" and he patted the dog affectionately on the head.

While resting, Dick told of the encounter with Joseph Farvel. Then he asked what had become of Menden and the others.

"They are all in camp up on the mountainside," answered Bob. "They made a tour of one small cave yesterday, but found nothing. We were all going out to-day, but went off on a hunt for you instead."

"If Robert Menden is smart he will lose no

time. Joseph Farvel means to get that treasure if he can."

"Well, I reckon it's going to be a neck and neck race," said Bob. "All I hope is, that Menden proves to be the winner."

It was not until sunset that Dick found himself in the new camp. All were glad to see him and listened with deep interest to the story he had to relate.

"You have received a taste of the sort of man Farvel is," was Robert Menden's comment. "Do you wonder now why I thoroughly dislike the fellow?"

"No, I don't wonder," answered Dick; "and after this I'm going to try harder than ever to keep that treasure out of his reach."

That night both Dick and Danny slept soundly and in the morning felt once more like themselves. It was resolved that in the future, if it was possible to do so, the whole party should keep together.

"And one man must remain on guard constantly," added Robert Menden. "If not, Joseph Farvel may treat us to a disagreeable surprise."

The party had, the day before, explored a small cave but a short distance from the river. It was now decided to let Remora take them to the great Dark Cave.

The path was a winding, tortuous one, and

they had to proceed with great care, especially as all wanted to avoid even the semblance of another mishap.

It was clear, and from one point where they stopped to take a rest they could see for miles. Far away to the north they beheld the church spires of San Juan, and beyond the rolling sea, shining brightly in the sunlight. On all sides were the rolling hills and sharp-backed mountains, clothed in living green of all shades.

"What an immense island for stock raising!" murmured Leander. "A fellow could have thousands of heads of cattle here. Just look at the thickness of the grass."

"This land will all be given over to coffee and sugar plantations in time," said Robert Menden. "Nine people out of ten care to raise nothing else."

They were resting under a big calabash tree laden with green fruit. Now they resumed their journey, through brush and stubble, for the trail had gradually scattered and been lost.

At last they approached a cliff all of two hundred feet in height. Before the cliff were great piles of rocks, overgrown with vines and gray moss. Behind one mass of rocks was a yawning hole not over six feet square.

"Dat is one of de doors to de Dark Cave," announced Carlos Remora. "Now we light torch,

please you;" and they halted while he fired up. The torch was a stick several feet in length and smeared over with a sticky gum. Carlos carried several, and all of the others had at least one apiece, tied over his shoulder, and all carried a goodly supply of matches in addition.

The descent into the cave was a gradual one for forty or fifty feet. Beyond the opening the cavern broadened out and became much higher. At the end of the descent there was a drop of a few feet, and after this the flooring proved quite level for over half a mile.

"Have a care of de birds!" shouted Remora. He meant the bats, which were circling in all directions over their heads. Near the entrance the Dark Cave is filled with them, and sometimes they brush against the visitor with their skinny wings, producing anything but a pleasant sensation. It was a bat which had knocked out the eye of the native before mentioned.

On they went, over a flooring of dark stone, reeking with wet, mould and slime. Overhead hung stalactites of lime rock, tinged with various colors from the minerals which lie hidden in these mountains of Porto Rico. In one spot a stalactite had fallen, and they picked it up and brushed it off, to find it of a rainbow hue, beautiful beyond description.

"I should think those stalactites would alone

be worth something," observed Bob. "They would make beautiful house ornaments, were they properly cleaned."

"They wouldn't stand the outer air long," answered Dick. "Such rock never does."

"Great Cæsar! what a cave!" exclaimed Don, after they had been travelling for a mile or more. "This is a regular underground world."

"You have not seen it all yet, señor," replied Carlos Remora. "Da werry long, werry broad."

All had their eyes open as they advanced, looking for a long, flat stone, with a cross cut upon it and the initials M. M. M.

Robert Menden had questioned Remora on this point, but the Porto Rican had assured him that he had never seen such a stone, and added that he doubted if there were any carvings in the cave. "Only werry few come here," he had concluded. "Most men afraid of de dark."

"It would be very beastly down here without a light," said Menden, as they paused in front of a yawning hole a dozen or more feet in diameter. "Where does that lead to, Remora?"

The native shook his head. "Can't say about dat. Nobody ever go down dem. Hark!"

He picked up a loose stone and hurled it down the opening. They heard it rebound from one wall to another a dozen times, the sound growing fainter and fainter until it died out altogether.

"That's awful!" whispered Leander, as he drew back. "That must lead to the center of the earth."

"Nonsense, Leander," replied Dick. "But it's pretty deep, I admit."

"Are there many such holes?" asked Menden.

"So many," the guide held up the fingers of both hands. "But dis is de big one. Everybody afraid of him;" and he walked on, unwilling even to remain in the vicinity.

From a distance came the sound of falling water, and presently they came to a tiny waterfall. Below was a pool of inky blackness and a small underground watercourse, which disappeared under the wall of the cavern a hundred yards away.

"I reckon dis knocks out de Mammoth Cave uf Kentucky," said Danny. "Why yer could build a hull city down here, dat's wot yer could!"

They had now reached the end of one branch of the cave, and turned back to try another branch. Soon they reached a point where the flooring was very wet and the drops of water came down steadily.

"We under ribber now," explained Remora. "Some day water come down in big heap and fill cave."

"Where does this water go to?" asked Don.

"Go to little ribber at waterfall."

"I see. Do you think it safe here with this water coming down?"

At this question the guide merely shrugged his shoulders. To his way of thinking no portion of the cave was safe, and only the thought of getting good pay for his services made him stick to the exploring party.

By one o'clock everybody was tremendously hungry, and all hands sat down in a comparatively dry spot to consume the lunch which had been brought along. There was also a pot of coffee, and by holding this over a couple of torches it was warmed up, and each had a cup of the beverage which, as old Jacob expressed it, "struck right ter hum in thet cold, forlorn region."

"So far, no luck," said Robert Menden, in disappointed tones. "I'm afraid I've led you all on something of a wild-goose chase."

"You musn't get discouraged too quickly," replied Dick. "Remember, treasure boxes aren't to be picked up every day."

"I had no idea that the caves of Porto Rico were so vast. The more I see of them the more I am astonished."

"I've been thinking that perhaps the treasure is down in a cave below this," put in Bob. "We ought to try some of those holes before we leave."

"I intend to do so. But we had better finish our examination of this cave first."

"It might be as how the natives carted thet treasure off long ago," ventured old Jacob. "Like as not somebody else knew of it besides the chap you met in Madrid."

"Well, all we can continue to do is to hunt," said Don. "I'm not discouraged yet by any means. If we—Hark!"

He broke off short, as the sound of a distant voice reached his ear. All listened intently.

"That is Joseph Farvel approaching!" whispered Robert Menden. "He has either followed us with his guides, or else he is making a search on his own account."

CHAPTER XXII.

INTO THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH.

"FARVEL!" exclaimed one and another of the boys, and Dick felt for his pistol.

"What shall we do—let the feller see us?" demanded old Jacob.

"Would that be wise?" queried the Englishman.

"I should calkerlate not."

"Then let us get out of sight with all possible speed," put in Don.

Not far away was a gloomy looking recess and into this they made their way. The torches were extinguished, leaving them in absolute darkness.

"Don't walk about," cautioned Dick. "If you do you may take a nasty tumble."

The caution was unnecessary, for the intense darkness made everybody stand as still as a statue. Listening, they heard Joseph Farvel moving along slowly. Then by the aid of the advancing lights, they saw he was accompanied by both of his former negro companions.

"Ha! what is that?" muttered the man sud-

denly, and they saw him pick up something. "A crust of fresh bread! Somebody has been down here. I'll wager it was Menden's party."

He continued to mutter to himself, but they caught no more of his words.

"Too bad I didn't eat that crust up," murmured Don. "But I've got some canker sores in my mouth and it was rather dry."

Joseph Farvel halted his party and peered around anxiously. But our friends kept out of sight and he discovered nothing of them. In a minute more he went on; and that was the last they saw or heard of him for the time being.

"He won't discover anything in that direction—at least, not if he covers the ground we covered," grinned Leander. "We were wide-awake and I don't believe anything escaped us."

They now turned off into another branch of the great cave—a long, narrow opening twenty to thirty feet in height. Here the rocky formation was soft and crumbling, and they had to pick their way with care.

"A slight shock would send down tons and tons of that stuff," said Robert Menden, as he pointed to the loose masses hanging as by threads over their heads. "Ugh! it gives a fellow the shivers to look at it."

Remora did not wish to enter. "No, no, come back!" he cried. "Him no safe!" But they lit

their own torches and went on, feeling every foot of the way, while the Porto Rican remained at the entrance to await their return.

The flooring sloped downward, and presently they found themselves traversing a circuitous way, which seemed to lead, so Don declared, to the very bowels of the earth.

"Don't slip," came from old Jacob. "If ye do——"

"You'll have a worse roll than I had on the mountainside," finished Dick. "No, thank you; once was enough for me."

But at last they reached a level again. Here the lower cave was not over five to six feet wide, but of such a height that the torches failed to light up the ceiling. The opening seemed to be a winding one and without end.

"If we don't look out, we'll get lost," said Bob. "We must be an awful way from the entrance."

As they advanced, Robert Menden threw down a little crushed rice, with which he had filled several of his pockets. "We can follow that trail back, if the worst comes to the worst," he declared. "But it will be a long and tedious work."

They had now another stream to cross. The water was clear and cold, and all stopped for a drink.

Danny was the last to bend down to get his fill. He had not yet finished when he started back and gave a yell.

"Wot's dat t'ing?"

"What thing?" they asked in chorus.

"Don't yer see it—agin de wall. It's comin' dis way!" and the Irish boy started to retreat.

All looked in the direction he pointed out and saw something like an enormous crab coming toward them. It was hissing viciously and was as repulsive a creature as they had yet beheld.

Bang! it was the report of Don's pistol, and the thing was pierced through the body and killed instantly.

"A good shot—" began Leander, when Dick and old Jacob both gave a cry of alarm.

"Look out, the roof is coming down! Run for your lives!"

Crash! Boom! Down came some of the loose rock behind them, and by instinct more than reason, they leaped across the underground watercourse, Don falling in, but quickly picking himself out again. They had scarcely advanced to a safe distance when there came another cracking and a dull rumble, and the entire passageway at the spot where they had stood but a minute before was choked up!

For the time being, all were too dazed and bewildered to do more than gaze in open-mouthed

wonder at the destruction before them. The air was filled with dust and dirt which blinded and choked them, and then came a sickening odor of released gases.

"Gracious, I didn't suppose a pistol shot would do so much!" murmured Don, when he could find his voice. "A quarry blast would bring the whole thing down, I suppose."

"We were lucky to escape with our lives," said Robert Menden. "No, it doesn't do to make too much noise in a cave like this. The sound waves are almost certain to loosen something overhead."

"I think this has placed us in a putty bad pickle," said old Jacob, seriously.

"What do you mean?" asked Bob. Then his face blanched. "Are we—we—hemmed in?"

"Thet's about the size on it—to my way o' reckonin'."

"Have the fallen rocks really closed up the passageway?" queried Robert Menden.

"O' course we can't say till we investigate, Mr. Menden. But it looks thet way from here," came from the old tar.

They wished to investigate at once; but old Jacob held them back. "More rocks might be a-comin' down. Take yer time—it will pay in the end." And they waited quarter of an hour longer.

At last they crossed the watercourse again and began to climb over the fallen mass, with their torches held aloof, watching for an opening. The climbing was dangerous, and more than once one or another came near to twisting his ankle or having his hand crushed, as the rocks began to settle one over another.

"Here we are!" cried Robert Menden at last, and pointed to an opening some distance away. It was small, and they had to pass through in single file; yet all breathed long sighs of relief when they were on the opposite side.

"I think we have investigated that branch as far as necessary—at least for the present," said Robert Menden. He looked at his watch. "Five o'clock!"

"Reckon we had better make fer the open air," was old Jacob's comment. "We have been down here long enough fer this day;" and the others agreed with him. Hunting for the treasure was not such an agreeable task as they had anticipated.

It was a long and tedious journey to where they had left Carlos Remora, and when they reached the spot the Porto Rican was nowhere to be seen.

"I'll wager he heard the downfall of rocks and made up his mind that we were all killed," said Leander; and he hit the nail exactly on the head, as was later proven.

There was now nothing left to do but to find the mouth of the great cave alone. They proceeded with caution, not wishing to make any false turn.

"I see the opening!" cried Dick, at last. He was right; and ten minutes later they were scrambling out into the open air.

"Oh, how good it feels once more!" remarked Don, as he inflated his lungs. "It's all well enough to go down there and hunt for money, but I prefer the open air every time."

The sun was beginning to set in the west. To the southward, dark clouds were beginning to loom up. Old Jacob watched the clouds with care.

"What do you think of them?" asked Dick.

"What do you think, Dick?"

"I should say there was a good bit of wind coming and, maybe, some rain."

"And I should say you were right, lad; and both won't be long a-comin'," concluded the Yankee tar.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A HURRICANE ON THE MOUNTAIN.

THE party watched the oncoming of the storm with anxiety, for they felt that a downpour on the top of that high mountain would be no light affair.

Danny had began to build a fire preparatory to cooking the evening meal, but now old Jacob stopped him.

"There is an overhanging cliff," he said, pointing with his long finger. "We had better look for shelter there afore we think of eating."

"You are right," said Robert Menden. "This coming storm may prove what the boys would call a corker."

They took up their traps, which had been hidden in the brush while they were in the cave, and set off for the cliff which loomed up less than quarter of a mile away. It was a difficult road, through brush and creeping vines and over rough rocks, and before it was finished, the big raindrops were beginning to patter down on the broad tropical leaves.

"Here's a pretty good place," said Dick, point-

ing to a hollowed-out spot eight or more feet in depth. There were several wild plantains in front of it, and it certainly looked a very good shelter.

"I can't make no fire here," said Danny. "De rain will put it out in no time."

"Build up close to the rocks, Danny," replied Don. "Here, I will show you;" and soon they had a fairly good blaze started, and Danny placed some water to boil.

By this time the storm was on them in all of its fury. The rain came down in sheets, so that they could not see fifty feet in front of them. The wind made the trees groan and creak as it swayed them in one direction or another.

"This is a small-sized hurricane, I reckon," observed old Jacob. "Hark!"

He put up his hand and they all listened. From afar came a dull, humming sound. It was coming closer.

"It's a hurricane, ez sure ez guns!" shouted the Yankee sailor. "I hope we are safe here."

"We ought to be," replied Leander. "Oh, my! Listen!"

The humming seemed to fill the air all around them, while the sky grew as black as night. Then came a wild rushing of wind and at a distance they heard several forest trees go down with a crash. A tree directly before their shel-

ter followed, and then the full force of the hurricane was upon them.

In a twinkle, one and another of the boys found himself lifted up and dashed against the rocks. The wind soused the rain in all around them, and the embers of the fire were hurled hither and thither, some sailing up into the air to disappear in the raging element. In front of the shelter the brush was torn up by the roots, and the very rocks seemed to quake and quiver, as if about to tumble down upon their heads.

"This is fearful!" groaned Bob; but nobody heard him, nor were the remarks from the others audible. The wind had found a crack in the rocks and through this it was whistling with the loudness of a steam calliope.

Swish! crack! bang! down came another tree before their hiding-place, and the uppermost branches were thrust at them, hemming all in against the wall. But this gave additional shelter, and now the wind that came after could not reach them.

In a few minutes the first fury of the hurricane was spent; but it continued to blow and rain at a lively rate, and this kept up until almost morning. To make even a torch-light was impossible, and they huddled together in the dark, side by side, with their backs to the cliff, silently praying that God might see them

through this peril in safety. And their prayer was heard; for morning found them wet, sleepy and hungry, but still unharmed by a hurricane which, in other quarters, had done untold damage.

"My gracious! that was worse than the blizzard we had on Snow-Top Island!" declared Leander. "I'll tell you what—I wouldn't want to be out in the Dashaway in such a blow."

"I trust the storm ain't found the yacht," replied old Jacob, dubiously. "If it got in the harbor it would play high jinks with the shipping."

"Oh, I hope it passed by San Juan," said Dick. The Dashaway was his pride, and he did not wish to see the beautiful vessel harmed.

It was with difficulty that the entire party found enough dry wood with which to kindle a fire. All were soaked to the skin, and it was decided to remain in camp until noon.

"Perhaps we would have been better off in the cave," said Bob. "I wonder if Joseph Farvel remained down there."

"As like as not," said Robert Menden. "But I think staying in such a hole in a hurricane is dangerous. You don't know what pranks a storm might play."

"Yes; if the wind got in there it would haul down a good bit o' the roof," said old Jacob.

While Danny was nursing the fire into a big blaze, several flocks of birds flew over the cliff. At once the boys got out their firearms and half a dozen shots brought down twice that number of the feathered specie. The birds were speedily dressed, and cooked, and made a welcome addition to their otherwise scant breakfast.

Robert Menden was anxious that no more time be lost, and promptly at noon, with clothing once more dried, they started off again for the caves. Carlos Remora had disappeared entirely, nor did he show up again, thinking that all of the party were buried under the fallen ceiling of the cave.

The side of the mountain was wet and slippery, and they had to proceed with care, for fear of slipping into some hollow and becoming seriously hurt.

On all sides were the evidences of the terrific storm—shattered trees, bushes laid flat, and here and there a ripped-up portion of grass, as if some giant's hand had reached down and twisted it up from the roots.

"It's wonderful what a power the wind has when it lets itself loose," remarked Dick. "I'm awfully glad we weren't caught out in the open."

"That's so," said Don. "We would have been blown to Kingdom Come."

When they reached the entrance to the Dark Cave they looked around for some trace of Remora and of Joseph Farvel's party; but the storm had obliterated all footprints and other signs.

With lighted torches they passed inside and down the first slope, which was now familiar to them. Their future operations had been talked over during the breakfast hour, and it had been decided to try a central branch of the great cave —one which Carlos Remora had told them had a very uneven flooring and was, consequently, but little travelled.

They had just reached the ending of the first slope when Dick saw a white object sticking up on the end of a stick.

"Hullo! what's that?" he cried.

"What's what, Dick?"

"That thing on the stick?"

"It's a sign of some sort," exclaimed Bob; and running forward he held the torch to it. It proved to be a piece of white paper stuck on a bit of tree bark. On the paper was written:

"WARNING!

"Be it known to all that I, by right of inheritance and also discovery, do hereby lay claim to everything of value which is to be found in this cave or any of its branches. I warn all out-

siders, and especially Robert Menden and his party, to keep away from my property.

"JOSEPH FARVEL."

"Oh, what cheek!" burst out Dick.

"He had better claim the earth and have done with it," put in Leander.

"Will you pay any attention to that?" asked Don, turning to Robert Menden.

"Do you think I should?" queried the Englishman, with a twinkle in his eye.

"No."

"Nixey," cried Danny, who could not always get away from his old-time slang.

"He hasn't any more right here nor any o' us," burst out old Jacob. "Jest let him try to stop me, thet's all. He'll reckon he fell in with a second hurricane!"

At this they all laughed. And that laugh settled matters. They would go ahead and pay no attention to the warning left by their enemy.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CHAMBER OF BONES.

On they went, the flooring under their feet showing that a good deal of the rain had washed into the cavern.

Robert Menden was ahead with one torch, while old Jacob brought up in the rear with the second light.

Between, the boys were spread out in a semicircle, each looking with all his might for anything that might resemble a long, flat stone, with a cross and the three M's cut upon it.

Along with Dick trotted Dash, his ears up, as if as ready as any of them to make an important discovery, did it lay in his power.

A quarter of a mile was covered, when they reached the branch for which they were searching. In the meantime Robert Menden had left a trail of crushed rice, that they might thereby find their way back.

They now found it necessary to climb over jagged rocks as high as their heads and higher —laborious work which soon put all in a state of perspiration.

"I guess this is about as hard as working in a coal mine," said Don. "I hope the rocks come to an end soon."

"This flooring has been thrown up by an earthquake," observed Robert Menden. "We must be careful, or somebody may fall through some fissure. And don't wander away, whatever else you do."

The boys promised to be careful. But Menden's warning was not needed, for in that gloomy spot they were perfectly willing to keep close to one another and could not have been hired to separate.

"I believe we are coming to the end of this branch," said Dick, half an hour later.

"There is a small opening to the left," replied the Englishman. "We will try that;" and as before, he led the way.

A narrow passageway was passed, and they came into a round chamber fifty feet or more in diameter. From overhead the water dripped constantly, and curious spiders and black bugs ran hither and thither, as the party approached with their torches.

"Oh, my! Look!"

The cry came from Don, and was taken up by several of the others.

"We've struck a cemetery of bones," said Bob; and he was right. On all sides of the chamber

were piles of bones, with here and there a row of skeleton heads!

"There must be nigh onto a thousand o' 'em," muttered old Jacob, as he surveyed the scene. "Never saw sech a tarnal sight in my life!"

"It's certainly a grim spectacle," returned Robert Menden. "I wonder how they happened to place these bones here?"

No one could answer that question. They hunted around for bits of clothing and jewelry, but none came to sight.

"This ain't to my taste," said old Jacob—"let us go on;" and on they went to a small cavern beyond.

Here the air was foul and unwholesome, and even the torches refused to burn, saving with a yellow, uncertain light.

"We can't stand much of this," said Leander. "I feel as if I was in a tomb."

He had scarcely spoken when Dick pointed out some bones lying in a corner of the chamber. Coming closer, they made out the skeleton of a man. Beside the bones lay several patches of clothing and a pair of old-fashioned iron-rimmed spectacles.

"That man lost his life here, sure," said Bob. "Look; one of his leg-bones is broken in half."

"More than likely he broke his leg and found it impossible to walk further," said Don. "And

then I suppose his light and food gave out, and he starved to death. Horrible!"

"I don't want to see any more of it," said Don, shuddering. "I guess he was an old man, otherwise he wouldn't have had those iron-rimmed spectacles. I suppose that skeleton has been here for a dozen years."

Dick was bending down over the bones, having seen something shining near one of the fleshless hands. He picked the object up and found it to be a long, flat, brass key.

"A key!" cried Robert Menden. He took the thing from the youth, and held it close to the torch. "By the queen!"

"What's up?" came in a chorus.

"See! The key is marked M. M. M. on one side!" And he pointed out the initials.

"It must belong to the treasure box!" ejaculated Dick.

"Hurrah! We're gittin' closer to dat prize!" burst out Danny, and shook his bullet-like head enthusiastically.

All examined the key with interest. It was a little rusted at one end, but still good enough to use if the cedar box was brought to light, as Dick declared.

"We are on the right trail; I feel certain of it," said Menden. "For that old Spaniard mentioned a pile of bones to me."

"I wonder if Farvel has been here yet?" said Don.

"I think not—and I hope he doesn't come."

They moved on more slowly than ever. The foul air was now left behind and they gained a chamber where there was a steady current of cold air which made one and another shiver.

"What's that?" said Don, of a sudden.

He had heard a strange sound, and now they all noticed it.

"Is it somebody moaning?" gasped Leander.

"It certainly sounds like it," said old Jacob.

"Perhaps it is Farvel in trouble," suggested Bob.

The moaning rose and fell, as if a person was in great pain and unable to cry out loudly.

"Where does it come from?" was Dick's question.

No one was able to answer, and they stood in a mute crowd, looking at each other. Danny gave a shiver.

"I don't like dat nohow," he whispered.

"No more do I like it," muttered Leander. "It sounds like a ghost!"

"Don't say dat, or I'll be fer runnin' away!" cried the Irish lad.

Dash put up his nose and added a long whine.

"Where is it, Dash?" said Dick. "Show it to us, old boy!"

The dog started forward, then stood stock still and showed his teeth.

There was another moan and then a hiss, and out of the gloom ahead shone two fiery eyes, moving slowly from side to side.

"Some beast!" shouted Robert Menden. "Have your pistols ready!"

He had scarcely uttered the words when a big cat shot past him and landed on Leander's left shoulder.

The creature was of the domestic specie, but evidently gone wild from hunger and loneliness.

"Help! take it off!" cried the boy, and tried to clear himself. But the cat hung the closer. Then it opened its mouth as if to bury its teeth in his arm.

A report rang out. Robert Menden had taken careful aim and fired. At once the cat gave a screech and tumbled to the ground, where it lay writhing and moaning. Another shot put it out of its misery forever.

The attack had taken Leander's nerve away from him, and the boy sank down on a rock and shivered, while turning as white as a sheet.

"It was terrible!" he murmured. "Say, I'm for getting out of this!"

"Oh, don't talk that way, Len!" cried Bob. "The cat's dead now, you know."

"But there may be more of them."

"I think not. She probably got in here by accident."

"And then that dead body, too!"

"I don't believe there are any more of those either."

"To be sure, it was very unpleasant," put in Robert Menden. "But it will have to be something far worse to turn me back."

"And me," added Dick. "I am going to stick to the hunt to the end."

And five minutes later the whole party went forward once more. But Leander kept close to old Jacob, and carried his pistol where it could be brought into instant use if required.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TABLET OF STONE.

By consulting a watch they found that it was after six o'clock; but they had brought supper along and ate this in preference to making their way out of the cave to their camp on the mountainside.

"Farvel must not be allowed to get ahead of us in this search," declared Robert Menden. "If he once got the treasure in his possession, the jig would be up, so far as we are concerned."

"It's queer we haven't seen anything of him to-day," said Dick. "He must be in the cave somewhere."

"There are so many branches we can easily keep apart," said Don. "It is like the branches of a great tree lying flat underground."

"And we are like ants looking for the right branch," laughed Bob.

"I feel it in my bones that we have the right branch here," put in Robert Menden.

"An' I feel thet way myself," added old Jacob. "I think we'll have thet treasure in forty-eight hours, or sooner."

Both torches had burnt low, and now they lit fresh ones, which threw a brighter light on all sides. They were moving along in a row when the Englishman called a sudden halt.

"There is a wide crack in the rocks ahead," he declared. "Look out that somebody doesn't tumble into it."

"Does it lead to the lower caves?" asked Dick.

"I'm sure I don't know, Dick. We can throw down a stone and see."

Robert Menden was about to look around for a suitable stone, when a cry from Bob caught his ears.

"The tablet!" yelled the boy. "Look! look!"

All rushed to his side and gazed in the direction that he pointed out. Sure enough, there on the very brink of the crack Menden had located, was a long, flat stone. At one end of the stone they saw that a rude cross had been carved. At the other end were the much sought-after initials, M. M. M.

"Hurrah! the treasure at last!" cried Dick, and felt like dancing a jig for joy.

"Where is the cedar box? I'm crazy to see how much it has in it!" put in Don.

"I guess we're all crazy for that," laughed Leander, his scare having been forgotten.

"It ought to be under the tablet," said Robert Menden. "Can the thing be lifted by hand?"

He examined the tablet, which rested on several rocks set in the form of a square, one side at the very opening just mentioned. The flat stone was a heavy affair, weighing all of six or seven hundred pounds.

"Ye can't budge thet by hand," said old Jacob, who was almost as excited as the rest. "It will take a block and fall, or a long lever, to do it."

"And we have neither!" groaned the Englishman.

They stared at each other blankly. What was to be done?

"Perhaps we can pull it away from the back," said Dick. "That is, if there is any way of fastening the rope."

As he spoke he reached across the tablet from the front and felt in the back.

"By ginger! the back's hollow!" he burst out.

"Hollow?" came from several of the others.

"Yes, hollow... Here, give me one of the torches and I'll take a look for the chest."

The light was speedily thrust forward, and while the others held him by the legs to keep from sliding down into the crack beyond, Dick made an inspection.

"The hole under the tablet is empty!"

A groan went up.

"Empty? Impossible!" said Robert Menden, and his face grew as white as a sheet.

"Yes, the hole is empty."

"But—but—" began old Jacob.

"The bottom of the hole slopes toward the crack," went on Dick. "I'll wager that when the flooring parted, the cedar chest fell down to the bottom of the split."

There was a murmur of relief at this. Perhaps the treasure was not lost after all.

"Let us throw a piece of torch down and see," said Bob; and his advice was speedily carried out. But the torch went down so far, its light revealed little but grotesque shadows, which might be treasure boxes or something else.

The crack in the flooring was eight to ten feet wide; but taking a run, Robert Menden cleared the distance, and aided by a rope, several others followed.

From this side they could look into the hollow under the tablet with ease. But this gave them little satisfaction, for the opening was as empty as Dick had mentioned.

"I've a good mind to try my luck with the rope," said Robert Menden. "We brought it along for the purpose of getting down holes, you know."

"Well, we'll let ye down as carefully as possible," answered old Jacob.

A noose was made and slipped around Menden's body, under his arms. Then a smooth

spot was selected, where the rope might run without scraping, and the Englishman climbed down over the edge.

"Now, lower away," he called out. "But go slow, and don't let me slip away from you."

He had a torch in one hand, while with the other he kept himself from striking on the various sharp projections which he encountered. He went down twenty, thirty, forty feet, and then to the very end of the line.

"A little lower!" he cried, as those above stopped and held fast to several knots previously inserted in the rope.

"Can't put out any more," called down old Jacob. "Ain't ye reached the bottom?"

"No; it's about ten or fifteen feet below this point."

"Can ye see anything?"

"See a lot of loose rock and—Yes, a corner of a box. I think the fall broke the chest all to pieces."

"We'll haul ye up and git a longer rope," returned the Yankee tar. "He's found the treasure right enough," he added, to the boys gathered around him.

It was no easy task to bring Robert Menden up to the flooring again, but at last it was accomplished, and the Englishman untied himself, none the worse for his trip to the region below.

All greatly regretted there were no more ropes at hand.

"If we had them we might get at that treasure this very night," declared Dick.

"Never mind; it's late," said old Jacob. "We'll go back to camp and rest, and bring the other ropes in by daylight. I reckon it won't hurt the treasure to rest another twenty-four hours."

"But we want to know how much is there, Jacob," said Bob.

"So we do—but we'll have to be patient."

"Yes, we had better go back," put in Robert Menden. "But first let us cover that tablet with loose rock, so if Joseph Farvel comes this way, he won't discover it."

This was considered good advice, and as loose stones were plentiful they soon succeeded in hiding the tablet entirely from view. Then the spot was carefully marked by another means, and they started once more for the outer air.

The climb over the rough flooring tired them thoroughly, and by the time the mouth of the main cave was gained they could scarcely drag one foot after the other.

"I'll sleep to-night, no matter if it does blow," said Don. "But I guess I'll dream of a lot of shining Spanish gold, too," he added, with a smile.

All were in the best of spirits, and several of the boys began to whistle as they set off for the camp on the mountainside. But this Robert Menden stopped.

"We want to do this thing as quietly as possible," he said. "Remember, we have both Joseph Farvel and the Porto Rican brigands against us. Even if we get hold of that treasure, we'll have a job to get it safe to the city or on board of the Dashaway."

Bob was in advance, knowing the trail pretty thoroughly by this time.

No sooner was the shelter under the rocks gained than he let out a wild howl.

"The things are all gone! Somebody has robbed us!"

Bob was right. During their absence the camp had been visited by some thief, and now everything, including the ropes and the cooking utensils, as well as their supply of food, was missing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LOOKING FOR THE CAMPING OUTFIT.

For the moment, all stood aghast over the discovery which had been made.

"This is Joseph Farvel's work!" cried Robert Menden, when he could speak. "He means to make us quit the search and go back to San Juan."

"The pesky rascal!" muttered old Jacob. "Jest wish I could lay hands on him, thet's all!"

"What is we ter do?" queried Danny. "I can't git no supper wid nuthin' ter work wid."

"This is certainly a bad fix," said Don. Then he looked at Dash. "Too bad, eh, old boy?"

"I forgot Dash!" cried Dick. "I wonder if he can't follow the trail of the thief?"

"To be sure he can," ejaculated Leander. "Can't you, Dash?" And the dog wagged his tail.

"Do we want to follow him?" questioned Menden.

"We want our stuff back," answered Dick, determinedly. "Besides, we can't do anything in the cave without those other ropes."

"Yes, let us follow the trail right now—if we kin do it," said old Jacob.

They were all out of humor, being tired and hungry, and had Joseph Farvel crossed their path just then, it would have gone hard with the man. But our friends had made a great mistake, as we shall presently see.

It took some little time to make Dash understand what was wanted. But when Bob took a bone and pointed at the fire, and at one plate that had been left behind, the canine knew what was wanted, and set off on a trot that made them all hustle to keep up with him.

The trail led over the very top of the mountain and to a little bamboo shack on the other side.

Nobody was in sight and they rightfully guessed that the bamboo shelter was deserted.

Entering, they found all of their traps piled up in a corner, together with some things which did not belong to them.

"Here's our stuff, and more," cried Don. "Good for Dash! He makes the best kind of a detective."

While they were sorting out their goods, old Jacob, who was at the doorway, announced that somebody was approaching.

"It's a man, but who, I can't tell, it's that dark," he said. "Better prepare to give him a surprise."

"I believe it's Farvel, and that this other stuff is his," said Robert Menden.

But as the newcomer came closer, all were surprised to see, not Joseph Farvel, but Bumbum, the good-for-nothing Carib.

"We've made a big mistake," murmured Menden. "I'd almost forgotten about this fellow."

"Well, I've not forgotten him," said Leander, grimly.

"Nor I," added Dick. "If he took this stuff, let us bring him up with a round turn."

It was agreed to hide, and they did so without delay, behind a bush back of the hut.

Bumbum approached rapidly, and lighting a torch, entered the clumsy shelter.

Then taking a rope he began to tie together all the articles belonging to the Dashaway's party, as well as the other things.

"Drop those, you rascal!"

The command came from Dick, and turning, the Carib found himself confronted by two men, five boys and a dog.

The articles in his hands fell to the dirt flooring with a bang, and he staggered back in terror.

"*Americano*—" he began, but could get no further.

"So we've caught you in the act," said Leander. "Pretty business for you to be in, isn't it?"

"Bumbum no understand," stammered the native.

"You stole our outfit," came from Robert Menden.

"Bumbum no steal anyt'ing, señor. Bumbum find t'ings on de mountain."

"You can't make us believe that yarn," cried Bob. "You knew the things belonged to us when you took them. You're a first-class sneak."

"Bumbum very honest, señor—nefer take not'ing, nefer!" And the Carib nodded earnestly.

"You took our ten dollars fast enough," said Dick. He turned to the others. "Hadn't he better give that money up?"

"Yes, make him give it ye back," said old Jacob. "He don't deserve a cent." And the others agreed with him.

When the Carib was made to understand what was wanted, his face grew as dark as the night outside. "You rob poor man—dat no fair," he muttered.

"You are a rascal and ought to be in jail," answered Robert Menden. "Give the boys their money back and be quick about it."

But Bumbum was a miser, and rather than part with a single *peseta,* he determined to try running away. With a bound he reached the

outside of the shack and started to run, when Don tripped him up and sent him headlong.

A short struggle ensued, but the Carib was speedily overpowered, and then his hands were bound behind him. In his pocket he had not only the money Dick and Leander had been forced to give him, but also the wallet stolen from Joseph Farvel.

"Here is your money, lads," said Robert Menden, as he handed the silver to the two boys. "I must say I don't know what to do about Farvel's wallet."

"Keep it, until you have the chance to give it back to him," suggested Bob; and this advice was acted upon.

"And now what's to do with this critter?" put in old Jacob.

"He ought to be handed over to the authorities."

This was certainly true, but the nearest *alcalde* was the one located at Aguas Buenas, over five miles distant and they had no desire to make such a trip that night.

"Let him go," said Leander, at last. "Boot him out of camp, and tell him we'll have him arrested if he ever shows up again."

"All right," answered Robert Menden, and Bumbum was released. A sharp quarrel of words followed, and then the Carib slunk away

in the darkness, more bitter against the entire party than ever.

"We want to keep our weather eyes open fer thet chap," was old Jacob's comment. "He's the sort as would knife ye in the back if he got the chance."

It was decided to remain at the bamboo hut over night, and a blaze was speedily started and supper prepared. Everybody was too tired to go hunting or fishing, and the evening meal was, consequently, a scant one.

It is doubtful if any of the boys slept very soundly that night. Each head was filled with visions of the golden treasure, and each tried to calculate mentally how much his share of the expected find would amount to, after the necessary expenses were paid.

Each had to stand guard for an hour, but nothing happened to disturb them, and by sunrise the camp was in motion.

"A hasty breakfast, lads," cried Robert Menden. "And then, ho! for the treasure."

"And may it prove to be twice as large as expected," added Don.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOSEPH FARVEL MAKES A MOVE.

BREAKFAST was about over, and Danny was beginning to wash the few dishes they had used, when suddenly Bob leaped to his feet.

"Joseph Farvel, as sure as fate!"

"Where?" demanded Robert Menden.

"Coming through the brush back of us. See! There he is!"

The youth was right; Farvel was making straight for the shack, followed by his two negro companions. He looked dirty and tired out, and his clothing was in tatters.

When he beheld them he stared in amazement; then halted, and drew his pistol.

"Stop, Farvel; we want no shooting here," cried Robert Menden, sternly. "Put your firearm back in your pocket."

"It's a fine game you played on me," growled Farvel, as he concealed his pistol and came closer. "Thought you were mighty clever, didn't you?"

"I don't understand you?"

"Don't you? See here; you can't play any

such game on me, even if we are alone among these mountains."

"What are you driving at, Farvel?" asked Dick, coming forward.

"Your crowd stole my traps—I see some of them in the hut. I want them back." And the fellow shook his head decidedly.

"You can have your traps and welcome," said Menden. "But we did not steal them. If they were stolen, the job was done by a Carib named Bumbum."

"It's a likely story!" was the reply, with a sneer. "Who is this Bumbum? I never heard of him?"

"The man who waylaid you on the road and robbed you."

"How do you know that?"

"Here is the wallet he took from you."

The article was passed over to Joseph Farvel, who accepted it with a cold stare. However, he opened it quickly to see if the contents were intact, and then smiled to himself.

"I don't understand your game at all," he muttered.

"It is no game, Farvel," said Robert Menden.

"How did you get the wallet?"

"Our things were stolen and, aided by our dog, we traced them here, where we found your goods mixed up with our own. While we were

sorting out the stuff we saw this Bumbum approaching. We hid in the bushes, and saw by the way he acted that he had robbed both of us and was going to tote his booty off. We collared him, and on searching him got ten dollars belonging to two of these boys, and your wallet. That proves that he was the man who waylaid you; otherwise, how would he have your wallet?"

"It's an odd tale, Robert Menden," came sullenly.

"And a true one, whether you believe it or not."

"Of course I'll have to believe it. But I want to talk to you about another matter."

"All right. But hurry, as we don't intend to spend all of our time here."

"You are hot-footed after that treasure, I see."

"We have a right to be."

"Didn't you see the notice I posted near the entrance to the cave?"

"That notice isn't worth the paper it is written on, Farvel. You might better have saved your writing material."

At this Joseph Farvel bit his lip. "Don't be so sure of that, Menden."

"We won't argue the point. I have given you your wallet—for which I've got no thanks

—and there are your other goods. You had better take them and yourself off."

"I'll go when I please."

"Then we'll go, and you can live in the hut and welcome," put in Dick. "Come, Danny, make up your bundle, and I'll help you carry it."

"Have you found anything of the treasure yet?" asked Farvel, curiously, as he turned to Bob.

"That is none of your business."

"I'll make it my business. The treasure is mine, and nobody shall rob me of it," was the fierce response.

"That treasure will belong to the party that finds it, Farvel," replied Robert Menden. "Don't deceive yourself by thinking otherwise."

"I know what I'm talking about. But, see here—" Farvel shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "What do you say to our doubling up and dividing the treasure when we locate it?"

At this proposition all were greatly surprised. Then they looked at Farvel's appearance, and quickly came to the conclusion that the fellow was growing discouraged.

"We do not need your assistance, Farvel," said Menden. "We'll do as we've been doing —go it alone."

"You won't form a partnership?"

"No."

"I think I can locate that treasure in another day."

"Then go and do it."

"I—I've located the flat stone already."

"What!" came in a chorus, and all of the Dashaway's party were much dismayed.

"Yes, and I'll have the treasure box, and unless you agree to assist me you won't get a penny."

"When did you locate the tablet?" queried old Jacob.

"Yesterday afternoon. I would have opened it only——"

"Only what?"

"I didn't have the tools, and it was cemented right in the wall of the cave."

"Indeed!" The old tar put up his hand to shut off the others from talking. "Farvel, I think yer a natural born story-teller. You ain't seed so much as a corner o' thet stone. It's a put-up job to make us take ye into partnership—but it won't work nohow."

"Jacob Ropes is right," said Robert Menden. "You haven't seen the tablet."

"It ain't in no wall!" burst out Danny, ere he had stopped to think twice. "It's—" He stopped in dismay.

"Ha! so you have located it!" cried Joseph Farvel.

"It ain't in no wall, fer de papers don't read dat way," went on Danny, bound to smooth matters over. "It's behind a monument wid lions' heads and carved snakes, and such t'ings around it."

"A monument with lions' heads?" queried Farvel, in bewilderment. "All right—if you know best." He paused. "Then you won't form any partnership?"

"No," said Robert Menden; and all of the others agreed with him.

Without another word, Joseph Farvel ordered his helpers to gather his things together. He was on the point of appropriating one of old Jacob's ropes when the sailor stopped him.

"Take yer own, an' no more," he said, sternly; and Farvel dropped the coil. In a minute more he and his party made off and soon disappeared over the mountain top.

"That was a bad break, Danny," said Dick, when Farvel was out of hearing.

"So it was," murmured the Irish lad. "But I guess I t'rew him off de track wid dem lions' heads an' snakes, don't you?"

"Perhaps so; but be more careful in the future."

"I think the best thing we can do is to hide

our traps, after this," observed Leander. "Who knows but what Bumbum or Farvel may be after them."

"That Carib may be watching us even now," said Don. "Let us search the bushes and see."

This was done, but nobody was brought to light. Then the outfit was hidden in a dense hollow, under some vines, and off they started for the Dark Cave once more, carrying all their ropes, as well as a stout canvas bag, with them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BOB IS TAKEN PRISONER.

THEY now felt thoroughly at home on the mountain top, and set a straight course for the Dark Cave.

It promised to be an exceedingly warm day, and they had not proceeded far before all were bathed in perspiration.

"This is too bad," observed Don. "We won't want to go underground while we are so hot. We may get a chill."

"We can rest awhile at the entrance to the cave," said Robert Menden. "We'll need it before climbing over the rough rocks to where that crack is located."

Reaching the entrance, they threw themselves on a grassy bank in the shade to rest.

Although they did not know it, Joseph Farvel was close at hand, and now watched them intently.

The fellow felt that they had discovered something, and wished to ascertain, if possible, just what it was.

"I'll dog them; see if I don't," he said to himself.

The negroes he had with him were brawny fellows, willing to do almost anything he ordered.

Presently Bob, feeling rested, sprang up and began to walk around near the entrance to the cave, and then toward a nearby pool of water.

His course took him out of sight of his companions, and close to where Farvel and the negroes lay concealed in the tall grass and trailing vines.

As the boy approached, a sinister look came over the man's face, and he whispered a few words to his black companions. They evidently understood, and nodded in agreement with him.

Bob had just procured his drink and was watching the flight of several birds near by, when he felt himself clutched from behind.

Before he could make the slightest outcry a hand was clapped over his mouth, and he was lifted from his feet and borne into the jungle.

Bob's eyes were wide open and he easily saw who had made him captive.

The natives carried him with ease, while it was Joseph Farvel's hand which was clapped over his mouth.

After several hundred feet had been covered, he was set down, and a handkerchief gag was inserted in his mouth.

"Make an outcry and you will be sorry for it," said Joseph Farvel, grimly.

Bob wished to ask where he was being taken, but was given no chance to do so. The natives bound his hands behind him, and then he was told by Farvel to march.

As there was nothing to be gained just then by resisting, poor Bob marched along, through the jungle and across several tiny mountain streams.

Presently they reached a rough shelter built of tree branches and palm leaves, and here they halted.

The boy was tied to a tree, hands and feet, the natives using some tough vines for that purpose. Then he was searched, and his pistol and pocketknife were taken from him.

"If I ungag you, will you promise to make no outcry?" asked Joseph Farvel.

As Bob was nearly smothered, he nodded his head, whereupon the obnoxious gag was quickly removed.

"What do you mean by handling me in this fashion?" demanded the youth, as soon as he could speak.

"Now don't get on a high horse, or it will be the worse for you," replied Farvel, bitterly.

"I ask you a direct question and I expect a direct answer," went on Bob, indignantly.

"I brought you here to get some information from you, young man."

"You'll learn nothing from me."

"Perhaps I shall."

"I'll cut my tongue off before I tell anything."

"It's easy enough to talk that way now. But you'll change your tune presently."

"I don't think so."

"We'll see. Do you realize that you are entirely in my power?"

"That doesn't scare me so very much, Joseph Farvel. You won't dare to do much."

"I am here for that treasure, and I'm bound to have it by hook or by crook. If you know anything definite, you had better tell me about it."

"As I said before, I'll tell you nothing."

In a rage Farvel stepped closer and slapped Bob's cheek.

"You little rat, I'll make you talk!" he stormed. "Your party has located the treasure; I feel certain of it."

Bob was boiling with indignation, and had his hands been free he would have knocked Farvel down. But he was helpless, and could do absolutely nothing.

"Are you going to talk?" demanded the enraged man, after a short pause.

"No."

"Don't you know what is best for you?"

"Perhaps I do."

"You act as if you didn't."

"I'll chance it."

"You shan't have a mouthful to eat or to drink until you promise to tell me all you know."

"Then I'll starve," said Bob, promptly.

Joseph Farvel had not looked for so much grit in the youth, and now he was completely nonplussed.

"You don't mean what you say."

"Try me and see."

"Have your friends located that tablet?"

"Go ask them, and find out—if you can."

"Don't get cheeky. What is your name?"

"Bob Hobart—I'm not ashamed of it either—as I would be if my name was Joseph Farvel."

"Don't anger me too greatly, or I'll—I'll——"

"What will you do?"

"I'll bring you to terms in a hurry."

"You can't bring me to terms. And now let me do a little talking. I demand that you set me at liberty."

"Go ahead and demand, and that is all the good it will do you."

"If you continue to hold me a prisoner, when I get free I'll have you arrested, just as sure as you're an Englishman."

"Perhaps you won't get the chance."

So speaking, Farvel walked away, to consult

with the blacks, one of whom immediately made off in the direction of the Dark Cave.

In vain Bob tugged at the vines which bound him. They were as tough as iron and refused to part. At last with a groan he gave up the struggle.

Half an hour passed, and then the second negro left, and Farvel approached Bob once again.

"Have you changed your mind about talking?" he demanded.

"I have not."

"If Robert Menden finds that treasure, are you to have a part of it?"

"If you wish to know so bad—yes."

"What part?"

"Robert Menden is going to give our party one-quarter of all that is found."

"Humph! I wouldn't be satisfied with a quarter."

"We consider that the treasure is really his—if he finds it."

"It belongs to me. Now I have a plan that ought to interest you. If your party will drop Menden and come with me, I'll give your crowd one-half of all we get."

"I'm not making a deal with you, Joseph Farvel. I wouldn't go into partnership with you for a million dollars."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't like you and I don't think you are honest. If you——"

Bob was allowed to go no further. White with rage, Farvel sprang forward and planted a blow directly on the defenceless boy's nose. The onslaught drew blood, which trickled down over Bob's mouth and chin.

"You coward!" moaned the boy, when Farvel hauled off for another attack. But now an interruption came, as welcome to the boy as it was terrifying to Farvel. What it was we shall speedily learn.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"Bob! Bob! Where are you?"

It was Dick who called out, about quarter of an hour after Bob had disappeared.

The party was ready to descend into the gigantic cave once more, and wondered why Bob did not return.

"Where can he have gone?" asked Robert Menden.

"I reckon as how somethin' has happened to him," burst out old Jacob, putting away the short briar-root pipe he had been smoking. "Didn't he saunter off in thet direction?" and he pointed with his long finger.

"He did," answered Leander.

"Where is Dash? He will find him," cried Don.

They looked around for the dog, but he was nowhere in sight, having gone off on a trail of his own after some small ground-animal.

Soon the entire party was hunting in earnest for Bob, but without success.

When they reached the pool of water, old

Jacob inspected the wet ground with interest.

"Here are lots o' footprints," he exclaimed. "Poor Bob's got into trouble, jest as I supposed."

"Some of the prints are of naked feet," put in Leander. "Those negroes with Farvel were barefooted."

"That's true," said Robert Menden. "Can it be possible that Bob has been carried off by Farvel and his tools."

"It looks that way," said Leander. "The question is, what have they done with our chum?"

All stared blankly at each other. Then Don got down on his knees and began another examination.

"If I was an Indian I might follow this trail," he said; "but as it is, I fancy I am not equal to it."

"If only Dash was here," sighed Leander. "What can have become of that dog? Dash! Dash!"

The call was followed by several others. At last came a short, suppressed bark from a neighboring thicket. Instantly Don and Leander made a run in that direction, and arrived just in time to see a big black fellow running away.

"Stop, or I'll fire at you!" cried Don, and

pulled his pistol; but in a second more the fellow was out of range behind several trees.

The native had been sent forward to kill the canine, Farvel feeling certain that otherwise Dash would be used to locate his captive master.

The native had been in the act of firing at Dash, when Leander and Don appeared.

As it was, Dash was limping painfully from a slight wound in the foreshoulder.

"Good dog!" cried Don. "So he meant to kill you? Too bad!" And he hugged faithful old Dash around the neck.

The others soon came up, and it was decided to follow the trail of the native without delay.

This was an easy but slow undertaking for Dash, and this time they kept up with the canine with ease.

The trail led directly to where Farvel was keeping Bob a prisoner, and they came in sight just as the rascal had punched the helpless lad in the nose.

"Oh, the villain!"cried Dick, and rushing up behind Farvel he hit the man such a heavy blow in the neck that Farvel dropped like a log.

Seeing this, the native disappeared, and it may as well be stated here that he did not return, nor did the other black come back.

Farvel was nearly stunned, and by the time

he recovered, old Jacob had released Bob by cutting the vines with his sharp jack-knife.

"Who—what—" stammered Farvel, when he could speak. Then he saw the crowd gathered around him and his face fell.

"Oh, how glad I am that you came up," cried Bob. "I believe he was going to kill me!"

"Wasn't going to do anything of the sort," growled Farvel. "You just let me alone."

"I fancy I will let you alone," panted Bob, "after I am square with you. Take that!" And as the man got up, Bob slapped him with such force in the mouth that Farvel's teeth rattled. "You are a brute, and ought to be in jail."

"Tell us your story, Bob," said Robert Menden, and the tale was speedily forthcoming. Farvel tried several times to interrupt, but was not allowed.

"We'll make him our prisoner now," said old Jacob, grimly. "It ain't safe to leave him roamin' around loose."

"Me a prisoner!" gasped Joseph Farvel. "I rather guess not!"

"Yes, tie him up," said Bob. "We can set him free later on, when we hand him over to the authorities."

Farvel fumed and used language not fit to transcribe to these pages. But this availed him

nothing, and soon his hands were bound as tightly as Bob's had been.

"Now march!" ordered old Jacob.

"Where to?"

"March, an' ye'll find out soon enough. Forward, or I'll boot ye!" and the old tar looked so fierce that Farvel moved off without further parley.

The course of the party was directly for the cave entrance. Arriving here, a consultation was held, and it was decided to take Farvel to a grove some distance to the left. Here the rascal was fastened to a cedar tree.

"We'll come back for you by night," said Robert Menden. "In the meantime here are some crackers and a drink of water for you," and he held them up so that Farvel could get at them. At first the fellow wanted to refuse, but soon thought better of it, having a fear of suffering from thirst and hunger.

Joseph Farvel was boiling with inward rage. Yet he did not dare say too much, fearing that the party would turn on him. Soon he was left to himself. Yet they were not yet done with him.

"A good bit of time lost," remarked Robert Menden, as he consulted his watch. "But I am glad we now have Farvel where he can do us no further harm."

The entrance to the cave passed, they speedily found their way to the chamber of bones, and then to where the tablet was located.

All was exactly as they had left it and Robert Menden breathed a long sigh of relief.

"Now, we ought to have that treasure in our possession before we leave to-night," he said.

"Ye can't git it none too quick for any o' us!" grinned old Jacob. "Ain't thet so, boys?"

"You're right!" cried Dick. "Hurry up with the ropes."

The coils were speedily forthcoming, and the two heaviest were well knotted together. Then Robert Menden prepared to descend once more —this time with the canvas bag on his back. In one hand he carried a fresh torch, which made that portion of the crack in the rocks almost as bright as day.

"Gently now," he cautioned, as he swung downward. "I don't want to break my neck for all the gold on the island."

"We'll be careful," answered Bob; and then all took hold of the rope, and Menden was lowered slowly but steadily.

He had passed something like twenty feet further down than on his previous trip, when he called to them to halt.

"I've found a resting-place," he said, when Dick threw himself flat to look down into the

gloom. "It's a sort of ledge. There is a wider opening further down."

"Is the box there?"

"I don't see it—yet. Hold onto the rope, for I may slip from here at any instant."

Dick promised to do so, and all kept the line taut as before. They heard Menden moving around and heard him toss several small rocks aside.

Then came a sudden yell, followed by the fall of some dirt or rocks, they could not tell which. The rope came up so quickly that all fell back in dismay.

"Something is wrong!" gasped Don. "Menden, are you all right?"

There was no answer to his cry, and he and Dick bent over the edge to investigate. But the torch was hidden, or had gone out, and they could see nothing.

"Haul up the rope," said old Jacob, quietly; and it was quickly done. The noose which had been around Menden's body was gone, and the end of the line showed that it had been cut by the edge of a jagged stone.

CHAPTER XXX.

FINDING THE SPANISH TREASURE.

"HAS he been killed?"

"What shall we do next?"

"I can't see or hear anything of him."

One and another stared at his companions. Robert Menden was gone, and there was no telling what had become of him.

"I'll go down and find out," said Dick, determinedly.

"But the danger, lad—" began old Jacob.

"I'll be very careful, Jacob. I have no wish to lose my life. But we must do something, you know."

The old sailor shook his head doubtfully. "If you lose your life, lad, I'll never be able to face your folks—not me!"

Nevertheless, he allowed Dick to tie the end of the jagged rope around him, and then the boy was lowered over the brink of the fissure, also with a lighted torch in his hand.

Down and down he went, and still down, until he felt as if he was entering the very bowels of the earth. His heart beat violently,

and several times he could hardly keep from calling to those left behind to pull him up. But he was grit, and kept on descending until the ledge upon which Menden had stood was gained.

All was uncertain about him. The jagged rocks loomed up all around him, and to one side was the vast opening the Englishman had mentioned. Dick waved his torch over it and concluded it was a bottomless pit.

Several tons of rocks had fallen, but most of the mass had gone over the edge of the ledge. There was a heap of small stones close at hand, and looking down among these the youth saw Robert Menden's body, partly covered up.

"Can he be dead?" he asked himself. "Oh, I pray God he is alive!" And then he heard the Englishman utter a short groan.

"He's alive!" he shouted. "But he's badly wounded."

"Better send him up, then," returned Leander. "Do you want another rope?"

"Yes."

It was speedily forthcoming, but, alas! it proved too short by a dozen feet.

"Let down some more," called Dick.

"We can't. That's all we have."

"It won't do."

"Can't you tie him on the rope you have?" asked Bob.

Yes, Dick could do that. But such a proceeding would leave him on the ledge without a safeguard. He shivered at the thought. Then he grated his teeth. "I must do it," he muttered. "It's the only way." He slipped down on his knees, and extricated the body from the stones and dirt that held it.

"Oh, my head!" groaned Robert Menden, and relapsed into unconsciousness.

With extreme caution Dick untied the noose about him, and adjusted it under Menden's arms. Then he braced himself on the ledge, and called to those above to haul away, and they did so. As the body swung upward, the canvas bag slipped on Dick's head, and he let it fall to his feet.

It was no mean task to get the unconscious man to the top of the fissure and to a place of safety. But, this accomplished, old Jacob set to work to bind up his wounds and restore him to himself. In the meantime the boys lowered the rope once more for Dick.

His first feeling of horror over, Dick began to gaze around him curiously. He hardly dared to move, for fear of pitching headlong into the pit; but he brought the torch low, and by its flames made out what looked to be a portion of some boards just beyond where he was standing.

"Dick, the rope is coming!" called Leander.

"All right—I have it,"—and with a sigh of relief the boy adjusted the end of the coil once more under his arms. He now felt free to move, and advanced upon the boards with caution.

The nearest came up with ease, and he saw it was of cedar and varnished upon one side. Then he looked further, and saw—shining gold!

There was a regular heap of it—Spanish doubloons and other coins of the realm—enough to fill his canvas bag three times over. At the sight he could scarcely contain himself.

"Hurrah!" he yelled.

"Have you found it?" came from above.

"Yes; a regular heap of gold, boys, all tumbled out of the chest, which has gone to pieces. We're in luck, and no further doubt of it."

There was a hurrah from those above, and Danny and Don executed a jig of delight. In the midst of the uproar, Robert Menden sat up and stared about him.

"Whe—where am I?"

"You are safe," replied old Jacob. "An' the treasure is found!" he added with a happy smile.

"Found! Good! But the rock fell——"

"And you went down under it, sir. But you'll be all right. Dick went down for you, and he's just passed up word that the gold is there."

"He must be careful. I—I—oh, my head!" and Robert Menden fell back again, too weak to go on. Yet he, like all the others, was supremely happy.

Without waiting, Dick began to fill the canvas bag, doing so with care, that none of the golden coins might become lost. Then he tied the bag to the rope.

"Haul away on the first load!" he cried, and they hauled away with vigor. At the sight of so much shining gold Danny nearly had a spasm.

"Well, if dat don't beat de nation!" he gasped. "Dare must be most a fortune dare!"

"It's a fine pile!" burst out Leander. "Tell you what, fellows, it was worth coming for, eh?"

"Any more down there?" yelled Bob, to Dick.

"Yes, two bagfuls," came the muffled reply. "Send down the bag again.

"Two bags!" ejaculated old Jacob. "Boys, we'll be rich—that is, you'll be."

"You shan't be forgotten," answered Don, hastily. "Nor Danny neither."

Again the canvas bag was lowered and Dick began the task of filling it a second time.

He had to work with extreme care, for the ledge slanted considerably, and at one point it

ran almost directly downward and was shaky besides, and he could scarcely keep his footing.

Up came the second bagful, and then the third followed.

"Keep it up there, now," called out Dick. "I'll bring the rest in my pockets."

"Don't miss any," shouted Don. "These doubloons are worth sixteen or eighteen dollars each."

"I don't intend to miss any," answered Dick; "but it's no mean work to move around down here—I can tell you that."

"Be careful," cried old Jacob. "If you have the most on it, better come up."

"Yes; leave the odds and ends of coin go," shouted Don.

A cry from Dick interrupted him. "Here's something else, boys—a little bag full of stones."

"Diamonds?" queried Leander.

"I can't say, for the bag is sealed up, and it's marked M. M. M. I'll be up soon now."

Dick continued to hunt around, in the meantime adjusting the rope under his arms, that a slip might not prove too dangerous.

Three more Spanish gold pieces were sighted, also a curious golden cross set with rubies.

At last it looked as if he had secured everything of value, and he called to those above to haul him up.

The others were busy counting up the gold pieces, but responded without delay, and in a minute he was swinging clear of the ledge and moving upward slowly but steadily.

His torch had almost gone out, and threw out far more smoke than flame.

Suddenly, when he was midway between the top of the opening and the edge, something caught his eye which filled him with horror.

In some manner the torch had set fire to the rope at a point two feet over his head. The strands were burning freely, and it looked as if in a few seconds more the rope would be burnt through.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DANGEROUS TUMBLE.

"PULL up quick, boys! The rope is on fire!"

Such was Dick's agonizing cry as he made his dire discovery.

"The rope is on fire?" repeated Bob. "How did that happen?"

"I must have set it on fire with my torch. Quick! or it will part and I'll have a bad fall."

"Hoist away, all hands!" sang out old Jacob, and exerted all of his strength.

The old tar and the others meant well, but it would have been much better had Dick been lowered to his original resting-place. Yet up he came, until he was almost within reach of the top of the fissure.

Then came the dreaded parting of the burning rope.

Down shot the boy, down and down.

His feet struck the ledge; but he could not save himself, and with a scream that rang in his companions' ears for days afterward, he went over the ledge, down and down, until nothing more could be heard of him.

As the burning rope parted, all of those holding the upper end were thrown on their backs, but leaped up quickly.

"He's gone!" gasped Leander, hoarsely.

"Dick! Dick! where are you?" cried Don, peering into the darkness below; for even the torch had disappeared.

No answer came back, although they listened with strained ears. All was as silent as a tomb.

And was that to prove poor Dick's grave? Silently they asked themselves the question, as one looked at another, all with blanched faces.

"I'd rather lose the fortune," said Don, voicing the sentiment of all.

"Give me that other rope, lads," exclaimed old Jacob. "I'll go down for him."

He stepped upon the burning end of rope and put it out. Then the reserve coil was fastened on, and he tied the end under his arms and lit another torch.

"Don't set the rope afire again," cautioned Bob. He could scarcely trust himself to speak.

"No danger," answered the Yankee sailor. "Let me down carefully now," he added, and disappeared over the edge of the opening.

Down he went until the ledge was reached. Here he paused to survey the situation. Nothing but the loose rocks and the remains of the shattered cedar chest met his gaze.

"Dick! Dick!" he called.

There was no answer, and the look on his face grew more serious than ever. The boy had gone further. But to where?

"Let me down some more," he called up. "But be careful. It's mighty skeery down here."

They promised to be careful, and the rope was let down inch by inch, until old Jacob had reached a point fifteen feet below the ledge.

"That's all the rope we have here," cried Bob.

The Yankee tar remained dangling in midair. On all sides of him were the walls of rock, dripping with moisture. He held the torch down, and saw, far below, the glitter of some dark, underground stream.

Dick had fallen into that. But where was he? The question was one impossible to answer. With care old Jacob took some light string from his pocket and threw it into the water. Like a flash a strong current seized it and carried it under a neighboring wall!

"He's gone, poor boy!" he muttered; and something like a tear stole down his bronzed cheek, for he thought a good deal of the young master of the Dashaway. From the top of the opening he heard Dash set up a dismal howl, as if to confirm his opinion.

It was a sorry crowd that gathered to hear

what the old tar might have to say when he came up.

"And you think he was carried away by that stream?" observed Don, sadly.

"No doubt on it, lad. He wasn't in sight, and the water fills the entire bottom of the opening."

"Then he is gone!" gasped Leander, bursting into tears, and little Danny joined in.

"Dat's de wust yet!" sobbed the Irish lad. "I don't want none o' dat gold—now!" And the others felt very much the same way.

"I've a good mind to go down and have a look," said Bob, and insisted upon it despite old Jacob's protestations. But he learned nothing new. Then Don went down, followed by Leander.

The result was the same, and all were forced to believe that poor Dick had been carried off by the underground stream to a watery grave.

By this time Robert Menden was able to sit up, and though still weak, he insisted upon being told about what had happened.

"This is certainly bad," he said. "I suppose I can be thankful that I did not meet a similar fate."

"That's true," answered old Jacob. "But I am not going to give up yet."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Get a longer rope from somewhere and examine thet hole thoroughly. If I only git his body it will be better nor nuthin'."

The matter was talked over for a few minutes, and then old Jacob hurried off alone, to where they had left Joseph Farvel a prisoner.

A surprise awaited the old sailor. In some unaccountable manner, Farvel had become free, and had disapperaed.

Under ordinary circumstances old Jacob would have begun an investigation but now other matters filled his head.

Farvel had left the rope which had bound him, and this the old tar appropriated.

Inside of half an hour he was back to where he had left the boys and Robert Menden.

Once more the rope was lengthened, and tested from end to end.

"Now be very careful how you hold it," said old Jacob. "It's no fool of a job to handle sech a long coil. And remember, if I whistle twice, let down; and if I whistle once, pull up. Three whistles, leave the rope as it is."

Once more he went down; first to the ledge and then to the very surface of the underground stream.

He found the water five to six feet deep, and running so strongly, that by going in up to his neck he was carried along so fiercely that the rope almost broke under the tension.

"He has been swept away and thet's the end on it," he muttered; and whistled to the others to hoist him up.

It was an almost silent crowd that bundled the treasure up in the canvas bag and a blanket which had been brought along for that purpose.

"I wish we hadn't come to Porto Rico," whispered Bob to Leander. "What will Dick's folks say of this when we tell them?"

"I'd like to know who is going to break the news," added Leander. "I'm sure I can't do it;" and he gave something like a shiver.

Robert Menden was feeling better, and presently he said he felt strong enough to walk to their camp. He leaned on old Jacob's arm, while the boys carried the treasure between them. The rope was left dangling in the water. "So that poor Dick can use it, if he comes around," as Bob said, clutching at a hope that was vainless.

Night found them established in a new camp, still sad, and next to silent. They had the treasure safe, but at what a fearful cost.

"It's enough to make one fling it away," sighed Bob. And when Robert Menden began to count up the gold, he turned away, unable to endure the sight.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHAT BECAME OF DICK.

"WHERE on earth, or under the earth, am I now?"

It was Dick who uttered the remark, as he crawled out of the stream, and sat down on a slippery and slimy rock.

The tumble over the ledge had been broken by a fall into the underground stream, and he had been hurled along by the current for a distance of fully two hundred feet.

He had felt that he was drowning and could hold his breath no longer, when he had shot up into pitch dark space, and climbed onto the rock mentioned.

He was almost exhausted, and for several minutes could do little but pant and hold on.

He had not the slightest idea where he was, saving that he had reached some lower shaft of the gigantic cave.

His companions must be above him, but how far, there was no telling.

His heart sank within his breast and he felt like giving himself up for lost.

"I can't swim back," he thought, as he remembered how that mad current had hurled him onward.

Ten minutes passed. He felt around for his torch, but it was nowhere within reach.

Then he got a firmer hold on the rock with one hand, while with the other he pulled a match-safe from his pocket.

Luckily the safe was a water-proof one, and the contents were, therefore, dry. Soon he had a lucifer lit, and by its tiny light he sprang to the shore of the stream.

There were some odds and ends of driftwood there—grass and bits of tree twigs—and of these he made a little fire. Then he bethought himself and set up a yell.

But as we know, his cries were not heard, and no answering call came back. The only sound that broke the stillness was that of the water as it took a plunge downward at one end of the opening he had entered.

"I guess I'm in a trap," he muttered. "But I must get out somehow. Oh, God, help me to get out!"

The prayer was repeated over and over again, and at last the boy grew calmer. Then he took the flaring driftwood in his hands and set out on a tour of inspection.

The chamber he had entered was not over

twenty feet wide by three times as long. To one side the roof sloped downward, and here there appeared to be another opening, running to some higher level.

"Anyway to get out," thought Dick, and scrambled up the slope. It was rough, and more than once he went down; but he picked himself up quickly and went on.

The upper chamber gained, the youth saw before him a long and winding gallery, moving gradually to a still higher level. Should he follow this?

Again he prayed for Divine aid, and then went on, over loose rocks and across ugly cracks. The driftwood had nearly burnt itself out, and his fingers were blistered in several places from holding it. Soon he would be in darkness again, and what should he do, then? He looked around for something more that might be lighted, but nothing showed itself.

On and on, and still on, following one turn after another. Now the driftwood had flickered down to the last dead twig. He tried to save the tiny flame—but with a flicker it went out—and all became as black as night around him—yes, even blacker than night.

He sank down on a rock, almost stunned. All of the stories of people lost in caves and coal mines that he had ever heard about, crossed his

mind—how they had wandered about for days without food and drink and light, to be found at last either dead or jibbering idiots. He felt that it would not take much to turn him crazy.

How long he remained on the rock he could never tell. At last, like one in a dream, he got up and ran—ran as hard as he could, as though a legion of demons were after him—along one rocky wall and another. His outstretched hands and good fortune saved him from many a nasty bump, and thus fully a mile was covered, when he fell down so exhausted he could not go another step.

"I'm buried alive!" he cried aloud; and a thousand echoes answered him: "Buried alive—alive—alive!" Then a strange vision came to him of untold horrors—snakes, demons, falling rocks and great torrents of water—and he fell flat in terror, and fainted.

When Dick came to his senses he leaped up, then sank back exhausted. Clearly he was out of his mind—for he thought that he was in a beautiful palace, and that a fairy of gold was dancing before him. Then the fairy seemed to motion him to come on, and he moved along slowly and painfully for fully a quarter of a mile. Presently the vision left him, and he sank down once again, only to get up when he was able, and run, he knew not where.

Ha! what was that? a light, or only another hallucination? No, no, it was a light—a spot of sunshine, streaming in from some opening overhead. He gave a shout of joy. Oh, to be free once more! Never, never, would he enter that cave again.

It was some time before he could locate the opening. Then to get to it was difficult. But the light gave him a superhuman strength, and up he went, over one rock after another, climbing a height that would have made him dizzy had he been able to see his way.

At last the opening was gained. It lay between two immense rocks, and he had all he could do to squeeze through. When he came into the outer air, the first thing that he noticed was that the sun was rising, not setting. He had been underground all night!

He looked at himself. He was thoroughly soaked, and covered with mud and a sort of soot. His face and hands were as dirty as his clothing.

"But I don't care," he murmured, half aloud. "Thank God I am safe! Oh, what an adventure that was!"

Not far away was a mountain spring, and here Dick got a drink, and then washed himself. He had no idea in what direction the camp lay.

"I wonder what the others thought when I disappeared," he mused. "I'll wager they felt pretty bad, Bob especially. Won't they be surprised to see me safe and sound!"

He was close to the very top of the mountain, and resolved to make a circle around the summit and see if he could not locate the camp.

Travelling here was easy, for the bushes grew but scatteringly, and there were hardly any trees. Presently he reached a slight eminence, and from this point made out the smoke of a camp-fire.

"That must be our camp," he said to himself, and struck off in the direction. Soon he was in the midst of the jungle, but managed to keep a straight course. Now his scare was over, he felt very hungry, but could not bring himself to stop for anything to eat.

"Danny shall supply me," was his thought. "I know he'll be only to glad to give me the best on hand."

The jungle passed, he came to a small clearing overlooking a deep valley. The camp-fire was just ahead. Not a soul was in sight.

"Have they gone on a hunt for me?" he mused, when of a sudden a man leaped upon him and bore him to the ground with ease. The man was Joseph Farvel.

"Turn about is fair play, I reckon," growled

the rascal. "Didn't expect to run across me, did you?"

"Let go of me," cried Dick.

"Oh, I'll let go," was the sarcastic rejoinder. "You had lots of mercy on me, didn't you?"

"You started the quarrel, Joseph Farvel."

"Did I? I reckon not. You did that—when you came here after the treasure that belongs to me. Tell me—has your party found anything yet?"

"I won't tell you a word."

"I'll make you!"

"You can't do it."

"Can't I? We'll see. Come."

With brutal force the man dragged the weak and wornout lad to his camp. With some handy vines he bound Dick's hands behind him, and then fastened the youth to a slanting rock. The rock was thin and set up against a second rock, leaving an opening like the letter A beneath.

Into the opening Farvel kicked the burning embers of the fire, and then heaped on more fuel.

"Now we'll see how you feel when your legs begin to get warm," he cried. "I reckon those vines will not catch for quite awhile, they are that green."

"Would you burn me?" cried Dick, in horror.

"And why not?"

"You are as bad as the savage Indians used to be!"

"I mean to have my rights," growled Farvel. "Now if you have anything to tell me, out with it."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

GOOD-BYE TO PORTO RICO—CONCLUSION.

DICK felt his heart sink within him. Farvel was in an exceedingly ugly mood, and looked as if he fully intended to let the youth suffer as he had intimated.

"You rascal! What is the meaning of this?"

The words were spoken in English, and caused Joseph Farvel to jump as though he had been shot. Turning, he saw himself confronted by several gentlemen, one of whom carried a pistol.

"Mr. Grey!" gasped Dick—as he recognized the gentleman Bob had brought to the Dashaway, while taking on stores at St. Augustine—"Help me, please!"

"Why, is it possible!" ejaculated the merchant. "You are—er—the young man from that yacht, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"And who is this—this villain?"

"An Englishman, who has tried to do our party a great deal of injury. He claims that a treasure that we have been hunting for belongs to him."

"That is no reason why he should treat you in this fashion. Stand where you are, sir, while I release the youth."

Several of the party sprang to Dick's side and one cut the vines. Then Garrison Grey turned to collar Joseph Farvel.

But the rascal realized the position he was in, and not wishing to serve a term in prison, he dashed away, straight for the jungle.

Dick went after him and called upon Mr. Grey to do the same, and soon the entire party of newcomers were in the chase.

More alarmed than ever, Joseph Farvel turned from the jungle toward a high bank overlooking the valley.

He was not careful of his footsteps, and of a sudden he plunged into a rocky gully all of fifty feet deep.

He turned over twice in his fall and then landed on his chest and shoulder. When the party got to where he was lying, they found him unconscious.

The newcomers were all Americans, out sight-seeing, and one of them was a well-known physician of Philadelphia.

"What do you think of this case, Doctor Carey?" asked Mr. Grey, while Dick looked on with interest.

"He has his shoulder broken and also several

ribs," replied the physician, after a thorough examination. "Luckily for him, I doubt if there are any internal injuries."

While the physician set to work to make Joseph Farvel as easy as circumstances permitted, the others turned to Dick and made him relate his tale, the boy only omitting the interesting detail that the treasure had been found.

"I've heard of these treasures, in Ponce," said the coffee trader. "They will belong to anybody who finds them. The smuggler who placed them there left no heirs."

Dick thought Joseph Farvel had suffered enough for his misdeeds, and decided to let the man go his own way—which was not saving much, as he had to be conveyed by litter to a wretched little hospital at Caguas.

Here the man laid on a sick bed for nearly four months, when he made his way to Ponce, on money furnished by Robert Menden. Menden likewise furnished Farvel with money to take him back to England, where he remained a sadder and, probably, a wiser man. The members of the Gun and Sled Club never heard of him again. "And we never wanted to," said Bob, in telling of the circumstance.

Garrison Grey's party had met old Jacob and the others on the road, and they directed Dick to his friends' camp. The owner of the Dashaway was hailed as one from the tomb.

"The Lord be praised!" cried old Jacob, as he embraced the lad; and then the others joined in, until happy Dick was almost hugged to death. Danny danced an Irish jig for joy, and prepared such a spread as none of the party had eaten since leaving the yacht.

It was decided by all hands, now that the treasure was found, to go back to the Dashaway without delay; and inside of twenty-four hours they were on the way to Caguas. Here Robert Menden paid a short visit to Joseph Farvel; but what passed between the pair never came to light, excepting that Menden gave the man the money mentioned. "Poor beggar; I couldn't do less," was all Menden would say.

At Caguas the party hired a native carriage, and with the treasure divided between them, set off on the ride to San Juan. All were armed, and a strict watch was kept for brigands; but Bumbum had learned a lesson and did not appear, nor did any others of his calling put in an appearance.

At San Juan the Dashaway was found just as they had left her, and it was with a long sigh of relief that Dick and the others boarded the craft, followed by the ever-faithful Dash. At once the man who had had charge of the craft was paid off, and stores sufficient to last them for a trip to the United States were taken on board.

It was decided to run directly for Savannah, and they dropped out of the harbor of San Juan one bright morning when nature seemed to be at its loveliest. The sun was shining brightly, the sea was almost as smooth as glass, and scarcely a cloud dotted the deep blue sky.

"Good-bye to Porto Rico!" cried Bob, swinging his cap in the air. And all of the others echoed the words. Then they sped on their course, and before night, town and coastline had faded far away in the distance.

It must not be imagined that the return to the States was made without incident. As in coming, they encountered a severe storm, and once came very close to drifting on the rocks in a calm, when the anchor was lost and not recovered.

But taken all in all, the voyage was a happy one. On the first days out they tried to count up the value of the treasure. But this was impossible, as they had no idea what the precious stones would bring in.

"I believe the gold is worth all of twenty thousand dollars," said Robert Menden. "Perhaps the stones are worth as much more."

"That will be forty thousand dollars," replied Leander. "Quite a haul, eh?" and he winked his eye joyfully.

They were in the best of spirits, and when

Danny was not working, he was dancing, or singing or whistling at the top of his lung power. "We'll be millionaires, dat's wot!" he was wont to say, to anybody who would listen to him. He intended to give nearly all of his share to his mother—a poor widow, who took in washing for a living. "It will most strike her dead; I know it will!" he whispered one day to Don.

But all voyages must come to an end, and one morning old Jacob electrified everybody by announcing that land was in sight. Before night they entered the harbor of Savannah.

It was Robert Menden, old Jacob and Bob, who took the gold to one of the banks and got a receipt for it. Carefully weighed, the treasure proved to be worth twenty-two thousand and three hundred dollars.

Then the stones were taken to a reliable jewelry firm, sorted and tested. Their value brought the total amount of the treasure to a little over fifty thousand dollars.

Of this, Robert Menden insisted upon keeping only one-half. The other twenty-five thousand was placed to Dick's credit. Of this amount the members of the Gun and Sled Club divided five thousand equally between old Jacob and Danny, and kept the twenty thousand for themselves—Dick, Don, Bob and Leander to share and share alike.

The good news was sent ahead by mail, and created a veritable sensation in Waterford. Poor Mrs. Guirk could not believe her good fortune, and shed tears of joy when Squire Hobart read to her the letter Danny had managed to pen, with Bob's aid.

"Sure an' it's a blessing from Heaven, Squire," said she. "Danny's a good b'y, but I niver expected this of him, never!" And she wiped her tears away with her apron.

When the Dashaway arrived at home the boys found the water-front of the town decorated in their honor. A grand feast was had at the home of Dick Wilbur, and here their various adventures had to be told again and again, for the benefit of the club members' parents, and their numerous friends. It was a jolly time and one never to be forgotten; and here we will leave them, satisfied that, no matter what adventures they may have in the future, they will never have any more thrilling than those encountered while treasure-hunting in Porto Rico.

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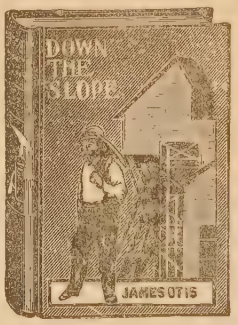

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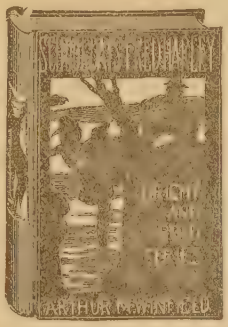

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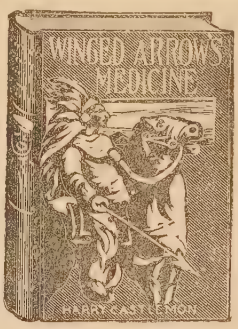

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